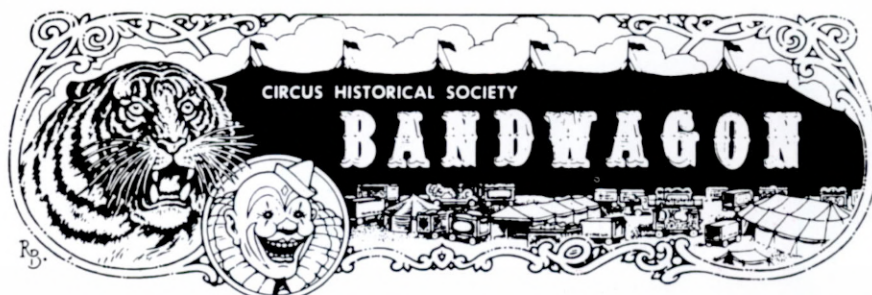




BANDWAGON

MAY-JUNE 1978



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Joseph T. Bradbury and Fred D. Pfening III, Associate Editors

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

For our cover illustration this issue, we look back with nostalgia 40 years to the spring of 1938, when Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows introduced one of the greatest features in the history of the circus—GARGANTUA, the 450 lb. gorilla. Of the many photos made of Gargantua, the one selected has not been widely published. Gargantua died on November 25, 1949, in Miami, Florida.

The illustration on the back cover goes back 20 years to the 1958 season, when Christiani Bros. Circus was at its peak, as one of the truly great truck shows in circus history. The photo was taken in Columbus, Ohio, June 14, 1958. Both photos are from the Pfening collection.

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THE FLOYD AND HOWARD KING RAILROAD CIRCUSES 1925-30

by Joseph T. Bradbury

Part IV - The 1928 Season, Gentry Bros. and Walter L. Main Circuses.

January 1, 1928 found both of the King owned railroad shows in quarters at Camp Knox, Kentucky, near Louisville. As mentioned in the last installment printed in the Jan.-Feb. 1978 *Bandwagon* the titles were to be switched between the two shows for the 1928 season. The 15 car show would become Gentry Bros. and the 10 car show would be Walter L. Main. One reason for the switch according to Floyd King in his taped interview was that Howard King, who had been the manager of the 15 car Walter L. Main show, resented old Walter L. himself hanging around the show so much. In fact, Howard wanted to cancel out on the deal to rent the Main title and go to a new name entirely but Floyd felt there was still some mileage in the Main title and wanted to keep it at least one more season. However, this is not the sole reason for switch of titles. The Kings wanted to repeat a goodly

number of towns in the coal regions of Kentucky and West Virginia, as well as some communities in New England which were well suited for the ten car show, and they felt a different title would be better for business.

In any event, the switch in titles was made and the respective wagons and other equipment were relettered. It was simply a name switch and no equipment was shuttled between the two shows. The parade wagons for the two shows were listed on page 7 of the Sept.-Oct. 1977 *Bandwagon*. Those which were formerly on Gentry Bros.

were now on Walter L. Main and vice versa.

Little or no news appeared in the trade publications during the month of January. However, there was one note in the Jan. 28, 1928 *Billboard* which said that Karl Knudson, who had been with John Robinson Circus in 1927, had been signed as contracting agent with the Walter L. Main show.

The circus world soon knew that Jess Adkins, manager of the King's ten car show for the past two seasons, would not be back as he had signed as assistant manager of Sells-Floto for 1928. This created a major personnel problem for the Kings as Adkins was recognized as one of the top circus managers in the business and had done a marvelous job with the ten car circus in 1926 and 1927.

The Feb. 11, 1928 *Billboard* finally gave some information of the activities at the Camp Knox quarters and

Photo No. 1 - Participants of Gentry Bros. Circus spec, "The Circus Follies", on lot at Jackson Heights, Long Island, New York, Aug. 18, 1928. In back at left is the Gollmar Heavy Carved Skyboard tableau and at right, the Large Oval Tableau (Ringling No. 4). Photo by E. J. Kelty.



announced some of the King brothers' plans for the coming season. First item said an order had been placed with the Warren Tank Car Co. of Warren, Pa. for 9 steel railroad cars. There would be 4 flats, 2 elephants cars, and 3 stocks, all 70 ft. in length. Delivery was to be made during the latter part of March. The article said with this new equipment all of the stocks and flats of both shows would be of steel construction. Other notes said that Gentry Bros. was to have a new program. All parade wagons had gone through the blacksmith shops and were now at the paint department. Twelve high school horses are being trained under the direction of Bert Wallace, who is also working on two 6 pony drills, assisted by Charles White. The 70 baggage horses of the two shows are on a big range adjacent to the winter quarters with Joe Wallace in charge. Gentry's program will have a number of acts new in America, having been booked by Charles Sasse, foreign representative of the Kings.

A separate article in the same issue said that the Walter L. Main show was rebuilding and preparing for its 49th annual tour. In the last 60 days 4 new baggage wagons have been built and all parade equipment will be out of the paint department before end of the month. The paint shops are in charge of Joseph Brody and William Beister. Joe Secastin is breaking the two herds of elephants for additional features. The menagerie was recently augmented by 2 zebras, 2 polar bears, 3 llamas, and a wart hog imported by Ellis Joseph of New York City. The Russell Uniform Co. has been given the contract for new wardrobe for the spec and parade.

The scarcity of King railway equipment photos makes it difficult to say with certainty where the new Warren built cars were placed. However, we have an eyewitness report that 4 new Warren flat cars were on the 10 car Walter L. Main show in 1928. Also, we have a later report that an all steel elephant car, obviously from Warren, was with the 10 car show. Photos confirm that Gentry Bros. had four Warren stock cars (one the elephant car); however, it appears all of the cars were not delivered at the same time. Note photo No. 3 which pictures the 15 car circus train shows one new Warren stock at the end but the other three are older cars. In all probability one Warren stock was delivered at the start of the season and the others later on. The Kings made a down payment on the cars with balance to be paid in periodic installments.

In late February it was announced that George L. Myers had signed with Gentry Bros. as equestrian director and would produce an opening spec. He had been arena director of the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West



Photo No. 2 - Gollmar air calliope on Gentry Bros. Circus lot, season of 1928. P. M. McClintock Collection.

Show in 1927, and prior to that, had been with Sells-Floto.

The March 3, 1928 *Billboard* had another article on the King shows in winterquarters. The piece said that Gentry Bros., getting ready for its 42nd annual tour, had constructed 8 new steel frame baggage wagons in the quarters since the close of the 1927 tour. Leon Blondin, Gentry superintendent of elephants, was rehearsing the herd and was also in the process of breaking 4 zebras. A separate note in the same issue said that it was a busy time at the Walter L. Main quarters. A new advance car had been received but no other details were given. Other news said that a new electric light plant with 2 25KW generators was turned out of the shops during the past several days. It was described as the last word in portable light plants, engines being built by Knickerbocker Company. Jimmy Gould, boss hostler, was back in quarters with some new draft horses and Joe Secastin, menagerie superintendent, was expecting a shipment of caged animals from Ellis Joseph, no doubt those mentioned a few weeks earlier.

It is of course entirely possible that 8 new baggage wagons were constructed, however more likely it was only an extensive rebuild. Certainly,

Photo No. 3 - Four stock cars of Gentry Bros. Circus. Note the new steel Warren built elephant car at far right. Date of photo is uncertain but is probably early season 1928. Pfening Collection.



some of the original wagons were getting old and needed re-working. In those days many of the smaller shows built their own baggage wagons in winterquarters shops so it is possible the report was correct. As for the newly acquired advance car the Walter L. Main show was said to have, again, the absence of adequate photographic coverage makes it impossible to verify.

The March 10, 1928 *Billboard* carried the following advertisement.

"Side Show People Wanted for Walter L. Main Circus. Freaks, and Novelty Acts, Snake Lady, accordian and musical acts, tattooed man. Impalement act. Turkish dancers. Describe act fully. State lowest salary and enclose photograph. Address Walter L. Main Circus, Camp Knox, Ky."

The March 24, 1928 *Billboard* continued with coverage from the Gentry and Main quarters in dual reports. It was still a busy time with Gentry having two shifts of mechanics at work in the blacksmith shop. All of the new baggage wagons being built are of steel frame construction. In the wardrobe department 8 sewing machines are at work on costumes for the new spec. Special music for it is being composed by bandmaster, John Griffin. Horses and ponies which had been out on the range are now back in stables and are being groomed by Joe Wallace. The Pacheco Troupe of 4 men and 2 women have been signed to appear in the Gentry performance for the coming season. Billy Pacheco features a triple somersault to a chair held on the shoulders of an understudy and will also present new tricks from the springboard. The other article said



that the Walter L. Main show would open on April 17, and that all parade wagons, tableaux, and allegorical floats were out of the paint shop. Finishing touches were being put on baggage wagons. In the rail car shops all work has been completed and painting was now going on.

The following advertisement came in the April 3, 1928 *Billboard*.

"Iron Jaw Girls Wanted for Walter L. Main Circus. State age, weight, and enclose photograph. Show opens April 17."

By early April the staffs of both shows had been set. Of course the most important change would be that Jess Adkins would not return as road manager of the 10 car Walter L. Main show. In the rosters as printed in *The Billboard* there is no manager listed for that show. It is believed that when Floyd King was away with the advance as he was many times during the season that J.S. Kritchfield, listed as press agent back, was in charge of the show. Kritchfield had been assistant manager to Jess Adkins the past two years and was experienced and fully capable of handling the show.

Roster, Gentry Bros. Circus, Season of 1928 - 15 cars

King Bros., proprietors and managers; Mrs. Howard King, treasurer; William Beister, secretary; Ralph Woodward, auditor; Al Clarkson, general agent and railroad contractor; J. C. Admire, load contractor; Thomas Cassidy, special agent; William Collins, contracting press agent; Paul M. Conway, general press representative; Joe Hinton, press agent back; James Shropshire, manager, sideshow; George Meyers, equestrian director; Bert Wallace, asst. equestrian director; Harry Lippman, supt. privileges; John Griffin, musical director; Sky Harris, supt. reserve seat tickets; Charles Cole, trainmaster; Joe Wallace, boss hostler; E. Hamilton, supt. commissary department; H. L. Merwin, supt. lights; Arthur Berry, supt. props; C. H. Singleton, supt. ring stock; Harry Miller, manager dining

Photo No. 4 - Gentry Bros. loaded flat car picturing left to right, unidentified tableau wagon covered by tarpaulin, small ex Gentry-Patterson cage, and No. 14 polar bear cage. Photo taken either 1928 or 1929. Pfening Collection.

car; Slim Buckner, and Red Monroe, supts. working crew; Al Hoffman, 24 hour agent; L. E. Blondin, supt. elephants; F. E. Weeks, boss carpenter; Frank Tooley, blacksmith; Emory Proffitt, manager advertising car No. 1; Albert Hottendorf, checker-up; Joe Hayworth, legal adjuster; F. J. Wiley, announcer.

(Howard King served as road manager for Gentry Bros.)

Roster, Walter L. Main Circus, Season of 1928 - 10 cars

King Bros. proprietors and managers; Joe Marks, treasurer; Henry Morris, secretary; Champ Simpson, auditor; L. C. Gillette, general agent and railroad contractor; Karl Knudson, local contractor; Joe Provo, special agent; Henry Mann, contracting press agent; Jack Doyle, advance press agent; J. S. Kritchfield, press agent back; William Hayes, manager, sideshow; G. W. Burkhart, asst. sideshow manager; George Franklin, equestrian director; T. D. Newland, supt. reserve seats; Mark Smith, supt. canvas; Robert Dickson, supt. dining car; Jimmy Gould, boss hostler; Jack Walsh, supt. commissary dept; Clarence Harmon, supt., props; Bill Carpenter, supt. ring stock; Al Hunter, supt. stock; Spider Johnson, supt. working crew; John Martin, 24 hour agent; Joe Secastin, supt. elephants; Bill Chilton, boss carpenter; William Hayes, supt. animals; L. M. Roberts, blacksmith; David Muir, manager advertising car No. 1; Joe Morgan, checkerup; R. N. Adams, legal adjuster; William Campbell, asst. legal adjuster; Joe Barrett, announcer.

The Chang Reynolds files have a complete list of the 11 elephants that were on the King brothers railroad circuses in 1928 which is as follows:

Danny, Eva, Mama Mary, Modoc, Pinto, Queen, Judy, Sally, Tillie, Topsy, and Vic. Six elephants were on Gentry Bros. and five on Walter L. Main, however, we do not have a complete breakdown as to which show each animal was on. Danny, Eva, and Mama Mary for sure were on Gentry Bros., and Modoc, Pinto, and Queen on Walter L. Main, but we don't know about the others.

As was customary for the past two seasons there were 6 cages on the 15 car show (Gentry Bros.) and 5 on the 10 car show (Walter L. Main).

There was no report that either show had any new canvas at the beginning of the 1928 season and it is believed all tentage had been used the previous season. Eyewitness reports say that Walter L. Main's canvas was in poor condition by mid-season and the overall appearance of the show was rather shabby. Despite the reports of "busy shops" and much repair work being done in quarters it appears a bare minimum of effort was made to rehabilitate the equipment especially on the 10 car show. One reason was that Jess Adkins was no longer on the scene to insist that the show be put in proper condition before he would take it on the road and another was that the Kings were short of funds. The down payments on the new rail equipment and animals was sizeable and left little in the till for new canvas or other improvements.

The 1928 circus season was now on hand. Railroad show going on the road included Ringling-Barnum, 100 cars; Sells-Floto, 30 cars; Hagenbeck-Wallace, 30 cars; John Robinson, 30 cars; Al G. Barnes, 30 cars; Robbins Bros. 25 cars; Christy Bros., 20 cars; Sparks, 20 cars; Gentry Bros., 15 cars, and Walter L. Main, 10 cars. The Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show on 30 cars went out as did Elmer Jones' 3 car, Cole & Rogers circus.

Overland circuses included Downie Bros., Mighty Haag, Seils-Sterlin, Barnett Bros. (Canada), Zellmar Bros. (title changed to Schell Bros. later in season), Moon Bros., Honest Bill, M. L. Clark & Sons, Silvan-Drew, Atterbury & Hooge, Vanderburg Bros., Russell Bros., Stark Bros., Hunt's, Ketrow Bros., LaMont Bros., Dorsey Bros., Marlow Bros., Brison Bros. and Orton Bros.

Railroad shows parading were Sparks, Christy Bros., Robbins Bros., 101 Ranch Wild West, Gentry Bros., and Walter L. Main. A goodly number of the overland shows also paraded.

The Walter L. Main Circus opened the season on April 17, at Frankfort, Ky., and the April 28, 1928 *Billboard* covered the event as follows:

"The 49th annual tour of the Walter L. Main Circus opened auspiciously at Frankfort, Ky., Tuesday (April 17). The high standard of excellence in the big show performance has been main-

tained. A good crowd was on hand at the matinee and at night the seats were filled and many were seated on the straw.

"At the noon hour the parade took possession of the downtown streets. Gaily caparisoned horses elicited praise, the gorgeously painted and decorated floats, tableau, and allegorical wagons are a credit to the painter and decorator. The wardrobe, all new, came in for its share of attention. Four bands and 2 calliopes were heard. (Author's note: There is no evidence the show had an air calliope in parade. The four bands consisted of the big show band split into two sections, the clown band, and sideshow).

"The outstanding performers were the Larkins, furniture movers; the Riding Crandells, the McKeon Family, Naida Miller, Theresa Barron and the Brock Trio. The performance is under the direction of Fred Nelson, equestrian director.

"Twelve double decked banners are in front of the sideshow, a 60 ft. with three 30's. The manager, Will Hayes, is assisted by Prof. G. Burkhart. Inside are Prof. Herbert Marshall and his 14 minstrels. On the different stages are the Desmonds, Hawaiian musicians; Prof. Hannah, fire eater; Mack and Williams in a novelty musical act; Mrs. Dewitt Newland, fortunes; Neal Johnson, bag puncher; Ward C. Hollings, tattooed man; Prof. Burkhart, magic and Punch; Mike Nichols, flageolet player; Wesley La Pearl, snake enchantress; Neil Hall, Pearly and Polly Robinson, Hawaiian dancers.

"Another sideshow, under the direction of Ray Marsh Bryden, features Ike and Mike, famed twin midgets and the Royal Haivlani troupe of 4 musicians, Bill Scoggins, petrified man, is seen in a pit show operated by William H. Agnew.

"T. D. Newland, boss ticket seller, is assisted by Jack Mills, Frank Orman, Walter Baird, Harry Harrington, Ray Choisser, and Jake Mills. Ticket sellers on the sideshow are Tommy Pence and C. C. Smith.

"Mr. and Mrs. Howard King spent the day, arriving early from Camp Knox, Ky. where the Gentry Bros. Circus is wintering.

"Among those on the lot were Andrew Donaldson of the Donaldson Lithograph Co., Newport, Ky.; L. C. Gillette, general agent; Walter L. Main, Geneva, Ohio, owner of the Walter L. Main title; and Henry Link, circus general agent.

"The Walter L. Main 1928 Program

1. The show opens with a spec entitled 'Cinderella', presenting Jean Woodward and Champ Simpson, as prima donnas and Sylvia Cotter, Rosemary Arthur, Marie Kimbell, June Chisholm, Mary Alpine, and Anna Harris.

2. The Brock Trio in acrobatic and gymnastic feats.



Photo No. 5 - Gentry Bros. Circus street parade, 1928 or 1929. In foreground is No. 14, polar bear cage, with clown band atop followed by a tableau wagon. Pfening Collection.

3. Shetland ponies with collie dog riders, presented by Fred Nelson.

4. Aerial ladder display, participants being Theresa Barron, Dixie Fisher, Myrtle Barnett, and Mary Barrows.

5. Elephants trained by Joe Secastin and exhibited by Veronica Crandell.

6. Frank Satiro, equilibrist; Two Jordans, club juggling novelty, The Brocks, perch act.

7. Bareback riding act, Marguerite Crandell.

8. Masconi brothers, comedy acrobats.

9. High jumping greyhounds, worked by Irene Rostello.

10. Double trapeze act, The Barrows.

11. Clowns.

12. Tom McKeon, Frank Satiro, and John McLeon, flying perch acts.

13. The Crandell Duo, in equestrian feats.

14. The Two Larkins, billed as furniture movers.

15. Aerial ring evolutions by the Barrows Trio.

16. Military ponies, presented by their trainer, Fred Nelson.

17. Clowns.

18. Champ Simpson, billed as 'The Song Bird of the Circus'.

19. Iron-jaw number, the performers being Theresa Barron, Dixie Fisher, and Sadie Clark.

20. Clown band under direction of Horace Laird.

21. Naida Miller, walking and dancing on the wire.

22. Dancing horses, ridden by Theresa Barron, Myrtle Barnett, Dixie Fisher, Sadie Clark, and Patricia Holliday.

23. Hippodrome races, clown cart race, Messers Nicholson and Burroughs; cowboy and cowgirl race, Mr. Jacobson and Miss Lawrence; gents flat race, Jamison, Larkin, and Logan; pony race, monkey riders;

Roman Chariots, Parkins and Dekote.

"Musical director, Henry Kern, is offering a program of wide selections and the various numbers came in for a good hand.

"Some very good clown numbers and walkarounds are introduced, the joey contingent including Hoarace Laird, Grover Nicholson, Orville Valter, Harold Morgan, Billie Burke, Alvin Matson, Ray Cousins, Earl Axmacher, Armon Jackson, Tom Patricola, Herb Artello, and Phil King."

The same issue said that the Aerial Kelleys who had been with John Robinson Circus for the last five seasons would be with Gentry Bros. The act had special wardrobe made during the winter for the cloud swings which are presented along with their double trapeze turns.

Ten days after the Walter L. Main opening, Gentry Bros. began its season at Middletown, Ohio, on April 27. The May 5, 1928 *Billboard* covered the opening as follows.

"Gentry Circus Starts 42nd Tour. Weather conditions unfavorable at Middletown. King brothers offering good program."

"Middletown, O., April 28 - Coming direct from winter quarters at Camp Knox, Ky., the Gentry Bros. Circus began its 42nd annual tour here yesterday and encountered rainy and very cold weather. At that, there was a fair showing at the matinee performance with the night house somewhat better.

"The King brothers, owners of the show, also of the Walter L. Main Circus, are entitled to much credit for the program they are offering. It has novelty and balance and the audience liked it, according to the applause given many of the acts. Considering the fact that it was the first day out, the performance ran smoothly under the direction of George L. Myers, who also does the announcing. John Griffin, musical director, offers both classical and popular selections.

"Among the features are Dalbeanne,

who does stair balancing and jumps on a big wagon wheel; Clyde O'Neal Trio in a fast ground bar act, one of the best in the business; Ernest White, head-balancing trapeze turn, finishing with upside-down head revolves; the Lindsays, Buckley's, and O'Neals who do some nifty work in comedy acrobatics; Perez and LaFlor, in ladder drops; Five Knights, who present two exceedingly good numbers — wire and tumbling, the Six Pachecos, in a rapid routine of acrobatic stunts, and the Buckley Brothers, in a fine hand-balancing act.

"The Gentry Bros. 1928 Program

1. The show opens with a spec entitled, *The Circus Follies*, produced by George L. Meyers, with Thelma Alton, Claudia Rivers, and Olga Schultz, prima donnas, and Flora Perez and Pompeii Christian, dancers.
2. Pony drills, dog chariots, and bucking mules, worked by Messers Wallace and Davenport.
3. The Buckleys in a hand-balancing act, Kaichai Koban, tub act, and Dalbeannie, in stair balancing.
4. Flying ladder display, the participants being Mr. and Mrs. Knight, Mr. and Mrs. Rojas, Mr. and Mrs. White, Miss Brown and Clyde O'Neal. The singers appearing in this number are Miss Alton and Mr. and Mrs. Schultz.
5. Clowns on the track.
6. The Cottrells and the John Davenport troupe in riding acts.
7. Three Pachecos and Five Knights in tumbling and the O'Neal Trio on the bars.
8. Concert announcement.
9. Ernest White, head balancing on the trapeze.
10. Two elephant acts, 4 in one ring, and 2 in the other, presented by Miss Crawford and Capt. Leon Blondin.
11. Two Buckleys, Three Lindsays, and Three O'Neals, comedy acrobats.
12. The Rojas on the revolving ladder, and Ida White, doing the loop on the trapeze.

13. Bird Song by Miss Alton.
 14. Koban, in head jumps on the stairs; Perez and LaFlor, ladder drop, and Uyada, foot juggling and balancing.
 15. Clown band, directed by Arthur Borella.
 16. The Five Knights on the wire.
 17. The clowns.
 18. Dalbeannie on the bicycle, Ida and Ernest White and the Kaichai Koban Japs on perches.
 19. Second concert announcement.
 20. A very good menage number, the riders being Misses Wallace, Cottrell, LaFlor, Buckner, Brown, Crawford, and Knight.
 21. The Six Pachecos, acrobats.
 22. Iron-jaw numbers by Misses Knight, Rojas, and LaFlor.
 23. Riding acts with Indian setting by the Davenports and Cottrells.
- "Some clever walkarounds and clown numbers are offered by Arthur Borella (producing clown) and his gang, Al White, Lawrence Cross, S. W. Bailey, Al Powell, John Ardell, George Lindsay, and George Emery.
- "Following the big show the Wild West concert is put on by Tex Crawford, Mrs. Crawford, Miss Buckner, and Charles Poplin, presenting trick and fancy riding, roping etc. Bill Leon, Greek wrestler, meeting all comers, also appears in the aftershow.
- "A nicely framed sideshow is under the direction of James Shropshire. Don Taylor is assistant manager, lecturer, and does ventriloquism. Attractions are Mme. Elizabeth, mindreader; Prof. Charles Rose, tattoo; Maxine, sword swallower; Abdallah Ben Deb, fire eater; Princess Rae, reptiles; Clyde Quitters, Egyptian drummer; Sig Ar-

Photo No. 6 - Gentry Bros. Circus on lot, season of 1928 (or 1929). Wagons left to right are ticket wagon, titled baggage wagon, light plant, Russia tableau, and air calliope (ex Gollmar Bros.). Photo by W. H. Pennoyer.

caris, impalement act; Bungloo and Hala-Haba, cannibals; Eugene Gentry, leader of the colored band and minstrels, Lucile King, Mabel Heath, Lulu, Harvey, Rose Powell, and Grace Ringling, Hawaiian dancers.

"The No. 2 sideshow with animals and reptiles is managed by William Bowles.

"John Griffin's band has 19 pieces. Howard King looks after the management of the show, and his wife is in charge of the front door."

After the Walter L. Main opening in Frankfort the show played add Hazard, Whitesburg, and Richmond, dipped down into Tennessee for a single date at Jellico, April 24, then returned to Kentucky for Corbin, Wallins, Harlan, and Cumberland. The final day of April saw the show at Norton, Virginia.

The *Billboard* said that at Winchester, second stand of the season, there was fair business and a mile and a half haul to the lot. In switching the cars that night a stock car was derailed and it was daylight before the train left town. There was a long run into Jackson, April 19, and a nice lot right at the runs. No parade was given and no evening performance was presented, the show's management saying that the natives are about as wild and wooly as they make them and no circus would dare risk a show at night. Hazard gave the circus two ringbank performances, so great were the crowds. Whitesburg, the first Saturday town, was one which will not be forgotten. There was a mile and a half haul around the mountains to a small lot in which it was necessary to corral the menagerie. Two good houses greeted the show but a newly surfaced highway which had to be traversed was a sea of mud and it was necessary to hold some of the wagons on the roadway by means of a block and fall. A 200 mile Sunday jump to Richmond, Ky., was made in record



breaking time, beating the passenger schedule by two hours. Walter L. Main himself joined again for a few days visit. A 98 mile jump then took the show to Jellico, Tenn., April 24, with the lot located in the heart of town and adjoining the unloading runs. Two fair sized crowds attended. This was a typical coal mining community and the miners were on hand with lamps on their caps. Corbin, Ky., the next day, was another mountain town depending principally on railroad employees which gave the show a profitable day's business. There was a short haul to the ball park, which was one of those fill-in jobs and Bill Erickson had his hands full as it took 30 horses to pull the heaviest wagons on to the lot. Wallins, Ky., the next stand, was a new town and Walter L. Main was the first circus of any size to play there. The Henry Ford coal mines are only 3 miles away from the town.

The show played Harlan, Ky., May 27 and the May 12, 1928 *Billboard* had an interesting article about the show's experiences that day as follows:

"Main Circus encounters difficulties at Harlan. A new lot was used, the Island Ball Park. Hardly had the show arrived before a cold rain started which continued until noon when it turned to snow. The lot was knee deep in mud and tons of straw were used. Two performances were presented to fair houses. All night it was a battle to remove the wagons from the lot which had changed into a veritable swamp. Canvas froze into a mass of ice. Thirty horses and 2 elephants were required to haul empty wagons from the lot and it was necessary to gilly and carry most of the equipment off the grounds to be loaded on the wagons now parked on hard surface. The center poles were 'snaked' off the lot and it was 2 o'clock the next day before the last wagon was loaded. The next stand was scheduled to be Cumberland, Ky., April 28, but the show passed it up when it was found the lot was covered with 7 inches of snow. The show then moved on to Norton, Va., arriving on a Sunday with performances scheduled for Monday, April 30. On a lot in the center of town the show had two capacity houses. Richlands, Va., May 1, was another big day, however, the road leading to the ball park lot was a quagmire of mud and there was plenty of trouble getting on the lot."

After only two days in Virginia the show moved into West Virginia at Princeton, May 2, where the show had only a 3 block haul and set up on a lot 2 blocks from the heart of town. Two fair sized crowds attended. The *Billboard* noted that rain had been experienced every day since the show opened except two, however, no complaints as to business can be made. W. J. Erickson, superintendent, is moving the show in fine stride, considering the difficulties

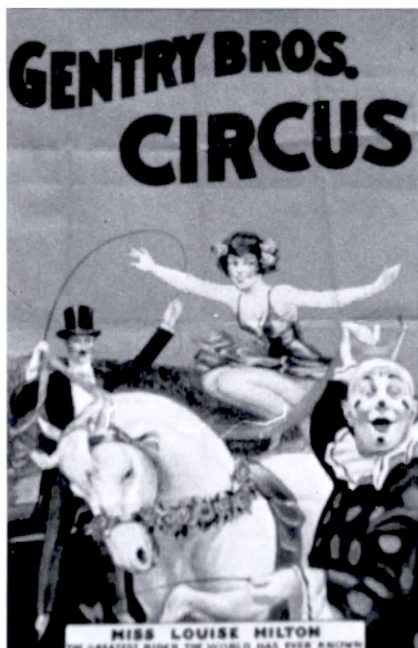


Photo No. 7 - Gentry Bros. one sheet upright used by King brothers 1926-29. Basic color scheme has titled in red on yellow background. The sheet advertises Miss Louise Hilton, "Greatest Rider The World Has Ever Known." Pfening Collection.

in climbing the hills and battling soft lots.

Gentry Bros., after its opening in Middletown, Ohio, moved to Richmond, Ind., for the second stand of the season and encountered opposition from Robbins Bros. which was scheduled in on May 7. Gentry had a capacity matinee in Richmond but cold weather held the night crowd down. The show moved back into Ohio the next day and was at Piqua on the final day of April. The show continued in Ohio until mid-May, playing dates at Delaware, Bucyrus, Wooster, Massillon, Ravenna, Mt. Vernon, Newark, Coshocton, Cambridge, Urichsville, East Liverpool, and Salem. Gentry next went into Pennsylvania with first stand coming at Sharon, May 15. The show continued in the Keystone state for the remainder of the month with final date at Corry on the 31st.

The May 26, 1928 *Billboard* said that Gentry Bros., now in its third week, was playing to satisfactory business. Ohio stands with one or two exceptions showed an increase over other years. The second date in Pennsylvania, Ambridge, May 16, a steel town, saw a fair matinee and crowded night house. The performance was running smoothly under direction of George Meyers. Spec never fails to elicit a great deal of comment and John Griffin, musical director, has composed an entirely

new musical score. The Pacheco Troupe is scoring heavily with a triple somersault from shoulder to chair, and Deacon Albright, steam calliope player, is going at it stronger than ever with a new boiler for the instrument. At Sharon, Pa., the Hagenbeck-Wallace advance car stopped overnight in the yards near the Gentry Bros. cars and there was much visiting.

The Walter L. Main show continued during the first week in May playing stands in West Virginia and was at Matoaka, May 3, followed by Kenstone, Gary, and Williamson. The show crossed the river into Ohio at Ironton, May 8, then made a return visit to Kentucky playing Paintsville, Jenkins, Pikeville, and Wayland. It was next back into West Virginia at Spencer, May 14, with another stand in Ohio the next day, Marietta, and then on to additional West Virginia stands at Sistersville, Mannington, Buchanan, and Richwood. A single date in Maryland came May 21 at Oakland, then swinging back and forth along the borders of three states the show played West Virginia stands at Moorefield and Martinsburg, Virginia dates at Winchester and Harrisonburg, and back into West Virginia for one final stand in 1928, Charleston, May 26. A Sunday run next took the show to Frederick, Md., and then it was into Pennsylvania for an extended stay with initial stand at Hanover, May 29.

The May 26, 1928 *Billboard* had a report titled, "Notes from Main Circus" which covered the show's tour in recent weeks. It said it had a fair day's business at Pikeville, Ky., May 11, on a lot a mile from town. It was noted there was plenty of "law" in the area, there being 67 deputy sheriffs in the county. Wayland, Ky., the next day, gave the show two capacity crowds. The sideshow opened at 10 a.m. and they came from far and near to the show mostly by mule back as there were nothing but mountain trails that lead into town. This is a mountain village only a few years old. The show Sundayed at Spencer, W. Va. and reached there at 5 p.m., May 13, after a 260 mile jump. The show made the move to Spencer in two sections. The lot was right at the runs and Walter L. himself came on for another visit. Two capacity crowds caught the show at performances the next day. At Marietta, Ohio, May 15, there was another nice day's business with the lot at the fairgrounds. The train was out of town at 12:30 a.m. Sistersville, W. Va., located on the Ohio River at the foothills of a mountain range, is an oil town with more than 200 wells within the city limits. Sadie Clark joined the show here. The Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show was in Wheeling, W. Va., nearby and was visited by several members of the Main show. Mannington, W. Va., May 17, was another

oil town. The train arrived at 5 a.m. in a downpour of rain but the parade went out at noon between showers. There were two fair crowds at the performances.

Gentry Bros. upon conclusion of it's Pennsylvania tour, June 1 at Bradford, entered New York the next day at Dunkirk. Additional stands in the state came at Tonawanda, Lockport, Albion, Canandaigua, Geneva, Oswego, Oneida, Little Falls, Amsterdam, Hudson, with final date coming at Poughkeepsie on June 15. The show then moved into New England for seven weeks. Initial stand was at New Milford, Conn., June 16, with other dates in the state at South Norwalk, Torrington, New Britain, Manchester, Middletown, and Essex. The show then played Westerly, R.I., June 25, returned to Connecticut for Norwich and Danielson, then went into Massachusetts for two days, Webster and Milford. On June 30 the show was back in Rhode Island at Warren.

There was very little in the trade publications about Gentry's route for the past few weeks. One short note said the show had fine weather and good business at Geneva, N.Y., June 8 and there was an interesting bit of information in the June 30, 1928 *Billboard* which read:

"For the benefit of agents wanting to play Lawrence, Mass. (shows have been compelled to pass up that city lately on account of a lot), J.C. Admire, agent of Gentry Bros., writes — 'At Methuen, a mile from the Lawrence depot is a ball park next to which is a lot for horse tents, cookhouse, etc. Methuen is a separate town and the selectmen granted me a permit for Gentry Bros., July 11. This lot is owned by the town and the clerk handles reader and lot rental. Shows can unload at Methuen and there is a three-fourths mile haul. The lot is on a main highway and the street car line is within the 10 cent per fare limit of Lawrence. Methuen has a population of approximately 30,000 and is right at Lawrence. Both towns are practically one. Feed, bread, etc. can also be contracted at Methuen and the town's selectmen ask you to buy within the city. The reader is \$50.00, two lots, \$150.00, water \$10.00.' "

In the meantime Walter L. Main Circus continued in Pennsylvania with stands at Lewiston and Sunbury and June 1 was at Bloomsburg with more dates coming at Mt. Carmel, Tamaqua, Mahoney City, Freeland, Leighton, Towanda, and Sayre. The show then moved into New York at Cortland, June 11, which was followed by other New York dates at Norwich, Walton, Liberty, Kingston, Ellenville, Port Jervis, and Walden. The show returned to Pennsylvania at Honesdale, June 20, then played Susquehanna and Carbon-dale, before going back into New York for Owego, Wellsville, Salamanca, and

Cambridge Springs. A final tour of Pennsylvania saw the show pick up dates at Franklin and Greenville as it moved westward. On June 30 the show was in Ohio at Conneaut.

The June 23, 1928 *Billboard* covered the Main show activities in the area played recently and said that at Towanda, Pa., June 8, the show had clear skies after several days of rain. There was a short haul to the baseball grounds lot on the banks of the Susquehanna River. A capacity crowd was on hand for the matinee and the big top was two-thirds filled at night. Sayre, Pa., June 8, had a capacity matinee during which a severe electrical and rainstorm broke out. On the Sunday off at Cortland, N.Y., June 11, Gentry Bros. was nearby at Oneida, N.Y. and many visits between the two show's personnel were exchanged. There were two good crowds at Norwich, N.Y., June 12, and on that day Jack Mills went ahead of the show as 24 hour man. Walton, N.Y. the following day saw the lot situated at the foothills of the Catskill mountains on the banks of Delaware River. There was a capacity crowd on hand for the matinee and at night the tent was two-thirds full. Liberty, N.Y., June 14, a summer resort town, was a big day. The haul was nearly a mile in length up a steep hill but the parade went out on time. Floyd King was back on the show after a visit to New York City. Several of the personnel visited Gentry Bros. which was at Poughkeepsie, N.Y., only 17 miles from Kingston, N.Y. where Walter L. Main played on June 15. The show had two big houses at Owego.

Gentry Bros. returned to Massachusetts and was at Taunton, July 2, with more stands in the Old Bay state to come at Falmouth, Hyannis, Middleboro, Quincy, Marlboro, Gardner, Leominster, and Methuen. Then the show moved into New Hampshire for Rochester and North Conway, and on to Vermont where it played St. Johnsbury, Newport, Richford, St.

Albans, Barre, Randolph, and White River Junction. A short return was made to New Hampshire where the show played Laconia, July 23, Claremont the next day, and then went back into Vermont for Bellows Falls and Brattleboro. A third visit to Massachusetts came at Holyoke, July 27, which was followed by Greenfield, North Adams, Housatonic, and Westfield. The show moved into Rhode Island, August 2, at Bristol, for one final stand in that state, then made its last date in New England the next day at Ansonia, Conn.

The July 7, 1928 *Billboard* had a note from Deacon Albright which said that Gentry Bros. had experienced wonderful weather the first 3 weeks of the season but since then there had been from 3 to 5 days of rain every week. However, despite the bad weather of late only the performance has been lost and business has been satisfactory. Deacon also said the show has received some fine press notices, the performance is running smoothly, and last week the Knight Family appeared in all new wardrobe for their two acts. The advance car with Emory D. Proffitt has 22 men with it and Ben O'Brien now has charge of the advance truck (No. 2 advertising car) which runs one week ahead of the show.

There was not much appearing in the trade publications about Gentry's tour of New England but one note said that Downie Bros. had played Brattleboro, Vt. on June 29 and Gentry came in on July 26. Another item said that when the Gentry advance car was in Newport, R.I. to bill the show's appearance scheduled for July 16 it was only a few miles from Rock Island, Quebec, where Barnett Bros. Circus was playing and several from the car crossed the border and saw the performance.

The August 4, 1928 *Billboard* said that Gentry's lot at Taunton, Mass., July 2, was two and a half miles from the city. Quincy, still has the "bog" lot which is more suitable for a water carnival than a circus. More than \$100.00 worth of straw was used there. Joe Wallace had the last wagon off the lot at 12 midnight, using 28 horses on

Photo No. 8 - Gentry Twin Steam Calliope on Walter L. Main Circus lot, season of 1928. Joe Bradbury Collection.



each one. Lillian Alton is singing "Wonderful Eyes" in the performance and Miss Schultz sings "Till We Meet Again." The Pacheco troupe's scoring and costuming and lighting effects used in the act are extraordinary. Cleo Wallace in her elaborate rhinestone costume creates quite a sensation, as does the head balancing act of Ernie White. The show has a real chef in Napoleon Reed. Big top is up every day on time and train is usually moving to the next stand by 12:30 a.m.

CHS Wes Herwig of Randolph Center, Vt., caught Gentry Bros. in New England in the summer of 1928 and provides this report.

"I was in New Britain, Conn., when Gentry Bros. played there June 20, 1928. The show's menagerie list that day was as follows: 6 elephants, 2 camels, 4 zebras, 1 llama, 3 bears, 1 tiger, 2 lions, 1 leopard, 1 panther, 1 tapir, and a cage of monkeys. Also in the menagerie were some ring horses, ponies, and mules.

"I saw the parade and recall that it was not too impressive. Most of the cages were closed in the parade that day. Some shows sprinkled closed cages throughout the march simply to arouse curiosity in those days. Gentry Bros. came into town with only two days advance advertising in the newspaper and they used small single column ads at that, so I judged they were on a tight advertising budget.

"Gentry Bros.' courier for 1928 was a 24 page gravure by Standard. It sure gives the idea that something much bigger than Ringling-Barnum is about to descend. Again, all the high sounding language has the Floyd King trademark for make believe and exaggeration. But we must remember that this was all part of the business in those days, and Floyd was truly a master with words.

"Gentry Bros. was in Randolph, Vt., Friday, July 20, 1928 and the local

Herald reported this. 'Rain, which began early and continued until about 2 p.m., interfered with the production of Gentry Bros. Circus here last Friday. It was no new thing, the press agent declaring that for the previous four weeks not a single day had passed without encountering more or less downfall. The morning parade was thoroughly soaked. The afternoon performance at Village River Park had nearly a full tent notwithstanding the weather discouragements. The evening performance drew a fair attendance.'

"So it is evident that the show hit a lot of poor weather on its New England trek in 1928. There is also a short account of a local youth winning \$10.00 by staying with the circus wrestler for a given period of time in the aftershow.

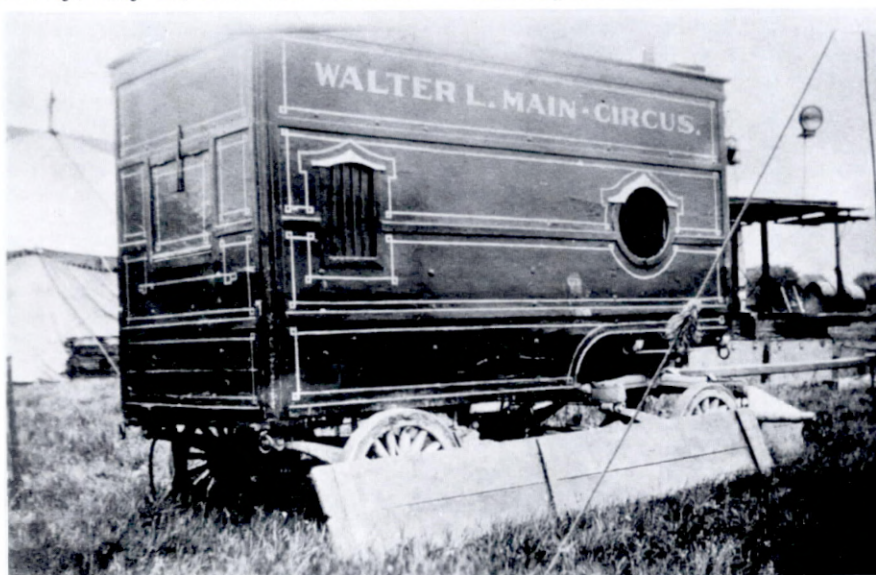
"Gentry in 1928 advertised 'Slovakian Orchestra Will Entertain At All Performances'. I don't know if they did, or if this was another figment of Floyd's overactive imagination. (Author's Note: It is evident that John Griffin's band would have been the 'Slovakian Orchestra').

"An interesting sidelight. About 30 years ago (1947) I chanced to go into an abandoned ice house on a rural back road in central Vermont and there in a corner of the dark old building found scads of Gentry paper in rolls with the 1928 Randolph date attached. Apparently it was dumped there by a country route biller who tired of his task and unburdened himself of part of his load. Sad to say, the atmosphere of the place had rendered it all worthless."

The late Isaac Marcks caught Gentry Bros. at North Adams, Mass., July 30, 1928, and recorded the following:

"All of the wagons were painted red.

Photo No. 9 - Ticket wagon on Walter L. Main Circus lot, season of 1928. Joe Bradbury Collection.



Flat cars were of steel construction. The show had 8 tents, big top, menagerie, sideshow, dressing room, cookhouse, kitchen, horse tent, and two candy stands. Lead animals were 6 elephants, 2 camels, and 4 zebras.

"Good crowds came out to see the show and at night the swinging ladders were lighted with all of the other lights being turned out. All seating was 10 rows high.

"As soon as the night show started the cookhouse, horse tent, sideshow, and menagerie were all down and being loaded. When the big top canvas was ready to load into the canvas wagon it was done by means of a derrick that was mounted on the sides of the wagon."

Walter L. Main Circus, after entering Ohio on June 30, at Conneaut, played additional stands in the state at Painesville, Norwalk, and Fremont, then moved into Michigan at Adrian, July 5. The show made an extensive tour of that state playing a total of 35 stands. Main was at Sault Ste. Marie on August 9 and continued in upper Michigan playing through the copper country with dates at Manistique, Munising, Marquette, and Hancock before moving over into Wisconsin at Iron River, August 15.

CHS Gordon M. Potter spent a short time on the Walter L. Main lot during one of its Michigan stands in the summer of 1928. He writes as follows:

"In the summer of 1928 my parents and I were going somewhere but don't remember just where when we saw paper posted for Walter L. Main's stand at Dowagiac, Michigan, for that day — July 11. We looked up the lot and spent maybe an hour between shows. Also saw the train which consisted of 4 flats, 2 stocks, and 3 coaches. The show had 40 head of baggage stock, 5 elephants, and 6 cage wagons in the menagerie. Got a kick out of seeing the show as it was a rolling rag bag. The canvas was the worst I had ever seen, wagons were terrible, props, seats, and everything in bad shape. I remarked at the time that the best thing on the show was the 4 Warren built 72 ft. steel flat cars and the next best, the elephant herd as they looked pretty good. The other animals and the horses were sort of a sad sight though. The show people cooked over a campfire, a hole dug in the ground about two feet across and a foot deep with a steel grill set over it to hold several kettles."

It is obvious from Potter's account that the 10 car Walter L. Main show had received minimum repairs during the previous winter and was in a pretty much run-down condition. However, from interviews with Floyd King and others who served on both the 10 and 15 car circuses, it was the smaller show which consistently made money and many times funds had to be transferred to the larger show to keep it going in 1928 and later, in 1929. The Walter L.

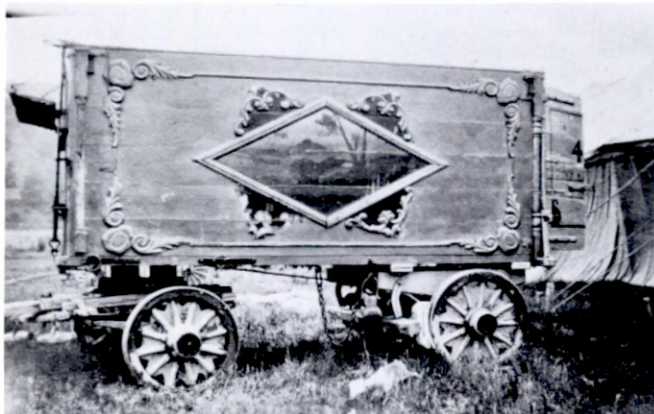


Photo No. 10 - Diamond Carving tableau (ex Gentry-Patterson) on the Walter L. Main Circus lot at Salamanca, N.Y., June 26, 1928. Pfening Collection.

Main show made a lengthy season in 1928 but very little appeared in the trade publications after the middle of July. After going into Wisconsin at Iron River, the show played Oconto, New London, Shawano, Antigo, Cranston, Ladysmith, Rice Lake, Park Falls, and Medford. It was up in this area where the celebrated small pox incident took place. This was one of Floyd King's favorite circus stories which he told many times on the speaking circuit during the final years of his life. For the reader who may have never heard this story, it went something like this.

A laborer on the show came down with what was suspected as small pox. King knew if they took him to a local physician the word would get out to the health authorities and the show would be quarantined and at that particular time it was absolutely essential that the smaller show keep moving as any delay due to the already strained financial situation of the Kings would be ruinous. So, in the middle of the night, the man was secretly put aboard a train and someone took him to Chicago for medical treatment. He did have small pox but no hint was made as to where the man came from and no mention was ever made of the Walter L. Main Circus.

The Main show went into Illinois at Mendota, August 27, and then played stands at Pana, Vandalia, and Marion as it moved southward. It was at Mayfield, Ky., on August 31.

Upon conclusion of the lengthy tour of New England, Gentry Bros. went into New York at Mamoraneck, August 4, then moved on to Long Island for stands at Port Washington, Glen Cove, Huntington, Riverhead, Greenport, Southampton, Sag Harbor, Patchogue, Hempstead, Queens, Bayside, and Jackson Heights, two full weeks on the island. The show next entered New Jersey for dates at Morristown and Newton, played

Stroudsburg, Pa., August 22, returned to Jersey the next day at Lambertville, then went back into Pennsylvania for stands at West Chester and York.

The August 18, 1928 *Billboard* said that an intense heat wave had affected Gentry Bros. adversely in recent days. At Mamoraneck, N.Y., there was a light matinee and fair night house. The thermometer registered 110 that day and the heat cut into business. There was a late arrival and the menagerie top was not erected. A flat car had derailed in the local yards when the train arrived causing a delay in unloading. The article noted that Gentry Bros. was travelling on 15 cars and had 410 on the payroll. The recent tour through Massachusetts was none too good. Willie Rawls' pit show was holding its own as was James Shropshire's main sideshow, although 1928 is conceded to be an off year with kid shows.

The August 25, 1928 *Billboard* said that Gentry's business on Long Island had been up to expectations, although there had been rain every day except two. W. J. Daplyn, advertising banner solicitor, says the last 3 weeks have been the best for him of the season. At Port Washington, August 6, a severe windstorm at 2:30 on Sunday, came up suddenly, causing slight damage to the menagerie top and cookhouse.

Additional news of Gentry's tour came in the Sept. 1, 1928 *Billboard* which said that Queens Village, Bayside, and Jackson Heights on Long Island were all new dates for the show. Patrons there were well pleased with the show. The train arrived in Morristown, N.J. at 1:30 on a Sunday with a mile haul to the lot. It was reported that the sideshow had done good business lately. Sky Harris, supt. of tickets, has left the show and at Jackson Heights, N.Y., August 18, noted circus photographer, E.J. Kelty, visited and took a group picture of the Gentry spec personnel. (See Photo No. 1). Another personnel note said that Lillian Thelma Alton had recently closed with the show.

Gentry made a long Sunday run, August 26, from York, Pa., to



Photo No. 11 - Sparks Sea Serpent Tableau wagon on the Walter L. Main Circus lot, Salamanca, N.Y., June 26, 1928. Pfening Collection.

Fredericksburg, Va., where performances were given on the following Monday. Additional Virginia stands came at Orange, Luray, Front Royal, Harrisonburg, and Lexington; then the show moved over into West Virginia at Hinton, September 3. Continuing in the state, the show played Mt. Hope and Madison, then moved into Ohio at Iron-ton, September 6, a town which the Walter L. Main show had played back on May 8.

The Sept. 15, 1928 *Billboard* said that Gentry Bros. had a late arrival in West Chester, Pa., August 24, which caused the parade to be called off but doors for the matinee opened on time and two big houses were on hand that day. York, Pa. will long be remembered — beautiful lot, at York fairgrounds, and cars parked on the grounds. No runs belonging to the show were used to unload the flat cars as there are two sets of permanent runs owned by the fair association which can be utilized by railroad shows. Business was fine at Fredericksburg, Va., but it rained all day at both Harrisonburg and Lexington which hindered business. A report in the same issue quoted Walter L. Main who said that he no doubt would manage his own circus in 1929, strongly hinting that this would be the last season he would lease the title to the Kings.

After going into Ohio, Gentry Bros. continued in the state playing at Jackson, Lancaster, Circleville, Wilmington, Hillsboro, Hamilton, and Troy. Then the show went into Indiana at Union City, Sept. 15, after which it played Shelbyville, Seymour, Madison, Columbus, Franklin, Martinsville, Princeton, Sullivan, Bloomington, Bedford, and Aurora. On September 29, the show had moved into Kentucky and was at Cynthiana and the final day of the month saw the Gentry train on a Sunday run to Richmond, Ky., where it exhibited on Oc-

tober 1. The Walter L. Main show had played Richmond on April 23.

The Sept. 22, 1928 *Billboard* said that Gentry Bros. would have a long season. The show had experienced fair business at Hamilton, Ohio. John Griffin has a 16 piece band, and Deacon Albright is still playing the steam calliope. The sideshow has had no "big" days but is doing average business. Another item said that Napoleon Reed had left the show as cookhouse chef and was now with the Mighty Haag Show.

In the meantime, the Walter L. Main show, after returning to Kentucky August 31, continued in the state playing stands at Central City, Russellville, Glasgow, Franklin, and was at Scottsville, Sept. 7, where it was locally reported that it was the first railroad circus to play there since Sells & Gray in 1900. The show moved into Tennessee for Springfield, Clarksville, and Paris, then returned to Kentucky at Murray, Sept. 12, after which it returned to Tennessee to play Waverly, Huntington, and Union city. A long tour of Mississippi began at Boonville, Sept. 17, and didn't end until after the stand at Water Valley on October 23. Both Walter L. Main and Sparks Circus entered Mississippi at the same time and both shows had their stock dipped on the same day and location and there was quite a reunion among the troupers of the two circuses. In those days many states such as Mississippi required circuses entering the state to have all of their live stock dipped in chemical vats as a prevention against the dreaded hoof and mouth disease. After Mississippi, the show moved into Tennessee to play Bolivar, October 23, but returned immediately to Mississippi for a stand at Holly Springs, then headed on to Osceola, Arkansas, October 26.

Gentry Bros. went into Tennessee, October 2, at LaFollette and after stands at Greenville and Elizabethton, made another visit to Virginia to play dates at Saltville, Marion, Galax, Pulaski, and Bedford.

Although the *Billboard* had now become completely silent on activities of the Walter L. Main show, it continued with coverage of the Gentry tour. The Oct. 6, 1928 issue mentioned that the Gentry show would be the first circus in Pulaski, Va., in two years and would use the ball park lot on October 9. A week later the *Billboard* said that Art Borello and Friday White had left the show, as had Ernie and Ida White, and Brown of the elephant department. The show's recent tour of Ohio and Indiana was said to have been very satisfactory. A late arrival in Aurora, Ind., Sept. 28, caused the parade to be called off. There was also a late arrival in Cythiana, Ky., the next day, the train not getting in until 9:50 a.m. However, the parade was given and the matinee was only one hour late. There was

plenty of rain and mud on the lot that evening.

The Oct. 20, 1928 *Billboard* said that S. W. Bailey, clown, had closed with Gentry. It was evident the show was having a large turnover of personnel, and in all probability, the Kings were lowering the nut for the performance because of the rather slow business the show had experienced most of the season. Bad weather through much of the season so far had caused most of the poor take.

Leaving Virginia, Gentry Bros. went into North Carolina at Roxboro, October 11, and remained in the state for the rest of the season. Later reports would have it that the show's tour of North Carolina was a disaster, creating a serious financial burden on the Kings and ultimately led to the demise of Gentry Bros. in the fall of 1929. Other stands in North Carolina came at Oxford, Lexington, Mooresville, Kings Mountain, Forest city, Marion, Lenoir, Lincolnton, Monroe, and Concord. The show played High Point, N.C., on October 25, and after the evening performance, the 1928 season suddenly came to a close. Dates already booked and billed at

Photo No. 15 - Newspaper advertisement for Walter L. Main Circus stand at Brinkley, Ark., Nov. 6, 1928. Joe Bradbury Collection.

COMING IN ALL ITS GLORY!
BRINKLEY, TUESDAY, **NOVEMBER 6**

WALTER L. MAIN CIRCUS

THE WORLD'S WONDER AMUSEMENT INSTITUTION

5750,000 CAPITAL INVESTED
5 Acres of Tent-5
5,000 SEATS-5,000
5 BANDS-5
30 AERIALISTS-30
45 RIDERS-45
10 HORSES-10
80 PEOPLE-80
100 ANIMALS-100

A HOST OF PERFORMERS
3 RINGS
2 STAGES
AND 1/2 MILE RACE TRACK
A VARIETY OF EXHIBITIONS CONSTITUTING 100 ACTS

GORGEOUS GLITTERING STREET PAGEANT AT 11:00 O'CLOCK DAILY RAIN OR SHINE. DOORS OPEN AT 1:30 P.M. PERFORMANCES 7 & 9 P.M.

USUAL CIRCUS GROUNDS

Ashboro, Aberdeen, and Wilson were cancelled. The train then moved to Dayton, Ohio, where winterquarters were established in the buildings formerly occupied by the Barney and Smith Car Company.

Very little appeared in the trade publications concerning the Gentry tour in North Carolina and its closing three days ahead of schedule. The Oct. 27, 1928 *Billboard* did mention that the show had a good day's business at Lexington, October 13, the parade made an excellent appearance and that the program moved with snap and precision. Downie Bros. was playing in the immediate area and both Sparks and John Robinson had been in the state earlier. A separate note said that Downie Bros. and Gentry were in opposition with each other in North Carolina and both shows were advertising heavily on the country routes.

Walter L. Main Circus, in the meantime, continued on the road for 3 weeks after Gentry closed. The show was at Monette, Mo., October 27, for a single date in that state, then came back into Arkansas after a Sunday run to play Walnut Ridge, October 29. The show then remained in that state for the rest of the season. Final stand was at Nashville, Ark., November 15, then the show moved into winterquarters in Alexandria, La.

A report in the Nov. 3, 1928 *Billboard* quoted L.C. Gillette, the Main general agent, that the show might possibly winter at Little Rock, Ark., and that he was making tentative arrangements to quarter the show at fair park in the city. Gillette observed that if Walter L. Main did winter in that city, Little Rock would then be the winter home of three shows, Cole & Rogers, owned by E. H. Jones, at fair park, and the C. A. Wortham Shows, large railroad carnival, at nearby Picron.

The Nov. 3, 1928 *Billboard* noted that Hunt's Circus had gone through High Point, N.C., the same day that Gentry Bros. closed and that many visits were exchanged. The Gentry train made the run from High Point to its new quarters in Dayton, Ohio, in 36 hours.

The files of the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wis., has an interesting letter written by George L. Meyers, equestrian director of Gentry Bros., to Zack Terrell, manager of Sells-Floto, late in the season. Written on a Gentry Bros. letterhead, it reads as follows:

Galax, Va. Oct. 7, 1928

Mr. Zack Terrell
Sells-Floto Circus
San Diego, Cal.
Dear Friend:

I am writing you a few lines to let you know that I am still on the above show and doing nicely. But as the season is fast coming to a close I don't want to sign here for another season. So thought I would drop you a line to see if you could use me with your show next



season? I have some new and clever ideas for several fine specs. Mr. Terrell, I will appreciate very much an early reply. Remember me to all the bunch and also, Mr. Terrell.

I am, Very Respectfully,
(S)
George L. Myers
Gentry Bros. Circus
per route

The Nov. 17, 1928 *Billboard* said that the Walter L. Main Circus, now in Arkansas, was the first time a show with that title had been in the state in 30 years. The article also advised the show would close at Nashville, Ark., Nov. 15, and would have put in 12,466 miles during the 1928 season.

The Dec. 8, 1928 *Billboard* said that the Main show had closed its 49th annual tour and had gone into quarters in Alexandria, La. The season as a whole was profitable. It had opened in Frankfort, Ky., April 17, 13 states were visited and the train had moved over 30 railroads. There were no serious accidents and no blow downs. Only 1 day was lost and it was caused by snow at Cumberland, Ky. No half days played but 3 parades missed. (Author's note: This contradicts an earlier report that the show purposely called off the evening performance in Jackson, Ky., on account of the wildness of the natives.) The same bosses which opened also closed with the show with one exception, and all of the current bosses have been re-engaged for 1929 as well as many of the performers. The show is wintering at the beautiful Central State Fairgrounds. Wagons and equipment are stored in a dozen commodious buildings, and the stock turned out into a 100 acre pasture on the grounds. During the winter the equipment will be rebuilt with the workshops under direction of Tex Caverness and Mark Smith. Joe Secastin is in charge of the elephants and animal department. D.C. Hawn and Kid Hunt, owners of a minstrel show, are wintering in Alexandria and are frequent visitors.

The Dec. 15, 1928 *Billboard* came forth with the news that Walter L. Main was not leasing his title to the Kings for 1929. He was quoted, "It is agreed between the King brothers and myself that I will not lease them the Walter L. Main title for 1929 to be used with the

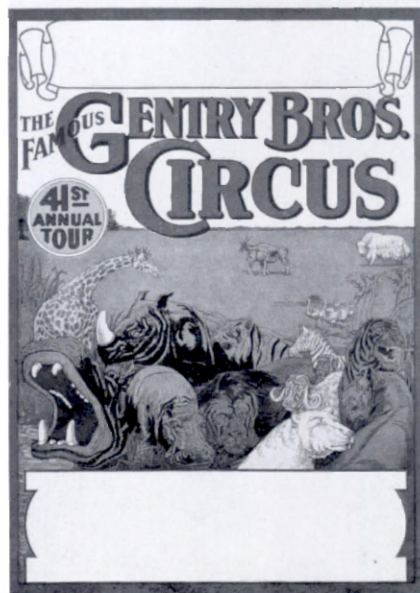
Photo No. 13 - Six horse hitch with the No. 1 Bandwagon (Gollmar 4 Mirror) on the Walter L. Main Circus lot, season of 1928. Photo by W. H. Pennoyer.

property which is in quarters in Alexandria, La. Friends of mine are working on plans to take out the Main show on 20-25 cars. If this deal does not go thru, others want the title to be used for a large motorized circus."

The railroad show never materialized and no show went on the road in 1929 with the Main title but in 1930 a new motorized show was framed by Walter L. Main and William Newton with Walter L. himself handling the advance.

The Dec. 28, 1928 *Billboard* said that the Kings had leased the title of Cole Bros. Rights to use the name for a term of years were secured from John Pluto. The well known title of Cole Bros. World Toured Shows, which has been off the road for several seasons, will

Photo No. 16 - Front cover of the Gentry Bros. 24 page courier by Standard which was used in 1928-29. Color scheme has title in red trimmed in black on white background. "41st Annual Tour" is in red with yellow background and animals are in their natural colors. Joe Bradbury Collection.



again be a factor in the realm of the white tops in 1929. Floyd King was in Baltimore last week to acquire the rights to the Cole Bros. title from John Pluto. The show is to open in April, greatly enlarged, with a program profuse with European acts secured from Charles Sasse, international booking agent in New York City.

In his taped interview, Floyd King said that John Pluto let them use the Cole Bros. title without any charge whatsoever. It may be recalled that Pluto bought E. H. Jones' 2 car, Cole Bros. Circus after that show had concluded its 1925 season. However, Pluto never did put it on the road again. The title had been idle from the 1926 thru 1928 seasons, but Floyd King said he felt it was a good title and should be an asset for the 10 car show. Both the Kings and Walter L. Main were glad their arrangement for lease of the Main title was concluded. Walter L. spread the word that the Kings had let the show run down terribly and there was bad feelings between them for some time thereafter.

And thus the year, 1928, came to a close. It had been the fourth season the Kings had operated flat car shows and the third in which they had put out both a 10 and a 15 car show. The overall season had not been profitable. The Walter L. Main show had done fairly well but the bad weather and other adverse factors had hurt Gentry Bros. considerably. For the first time the two shows went into separate quarters. Floyd did not give any reasons in his interview why both shows did not return to Ft. Knox. Possibly the quarters there were not available. The reason that the smaller show wintered in the deep south was probably to save the heavy rail charge to send it north.

In reality the 1928 season is a difficult one for the historian to understand. It was during the late 20's, a year before the stock market crash and the resulting great depression, and most shows should have come home to the barn big winners, but such was not the case. Not only did Gentry Bros. have it rough, so did the Al G. Barnes Circus. John Robinson had only a fair season, being plagued with bad weather much of the year. Sells-Floto had a wild bunch of elephants which had a tendency to run away during much of the tour. Two well known circus owners called it quits after the season and sold the railroad shows bearing their names, Al G. Barnes and Charles Sparks. Sparks, of course, later went back into the business, but Barnes remained in retirement until his death in 1931. For the Kings, the season was the beginning of the end for them. They had risen spectacularly in the circus world since the advent of their flat car circuses in 1925, but they had now suffered their first financial setbacks during the 1928 season. It would not be an easy time for them from now on.

A Legend Is Born

By Greg Parkinson

The Karl Wallenda story has been partially told many times in magazine articles, books, and newspapers. It has been related to us by word of mouth, photographs, and films. For over 50 years, raving reviews, awards, and tributes have been bestowed upon Karl Wallenda and his troupe of high-wire walkers. Over his phenomenal career, references about his triumphs and disasters have been reported in nearly every language in the western world. Assuredly this man is destined to become a legendary figure. Yet his life need not be glamorized to achieve this hallmark. The facts alone prove that Karl Wallenda was a remarkable person and the greatest innovator of high-wire routines in the nearly 200 year history of the modern circus. Certainly, his mark will stand the test of time.

Karl Wallenda's birthday was January 21, 1905. At least three generations of Wallendas performed in European circuses before Karl and his brothers understood what trouping was all about. Their mother, Kunigunde Jameson Wallenda, had entertained as a slack-wire artist, but no Wallenda had ever walked a high-wire. Kunigunde remarried George Grotefent whose short-toured song and dance review, the Grotefent Cavalcade of Musical Stars, provided Karl with his first memories on the road.

George Grotefent left his family to serve in the army of Kaiser William II, and the months which followed the assassination at Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, found Kunigunde and her sons struggling for an existence. In 1915 they moved to the town of Gros Ottersleben near Magdeburg, Germany. There after dark, Karl performed handstands in the Biergartens, dancehalls, and restaurants of the large industrial city, to help support his mother. After the war, Karl again went on the road with his step-father, this time with a small circus. But conditions in defeated Germany were not conducive to the circus business, and the show closed near Schneidlingen. There Karl endured the winter working deep in a coal mine. Like many other Germans, he experienced the harsh realities of the times, but he resolved to return to show business.

In 1921 George, Karl, and Karl's brother Herman, presented a revolving ladder act under the canvas tents of Circus Malve. Later that same year Karl journeyed to Breslau (in post World War II Poland) and at Circus



The Wallendas performing in the Cirque D'Hiver, Paris, France, in 1932. Circus World Museum Collection.

Busch he teamed up with Louis Weitzman's aerial act. Upon arrival, Karl was unaware that the Weitzman act was actually a high-wire presentation. But after a fearful audition, Karl settled into what became his life's work.

A feature of the Weitzman Troupe act was the hand to foot stand. In this trick Karl did a handstand on the upstretched feet of Weitzman as Louis lay on his back on the high-wire. Below

This 1928 studio photo was one of the first taken after the arrival of the Great Wallendas in the United States. They are Joe Geiger, Karl and Herman Wallenda and Helen Kries. Circus World Museum Collection.



acting as a counter-weight, hung the girl in the act, Margarita. In 1922 Karl met an illusionist's assistant, Lena Schmidt, who joined the act and soon replaced Margarita. While with Circus Sarassani, the personalities of Weitzman and Wallenda conflicted to the breaking point and the two split up in Dresden.

Karl continued to perform on the high-wire with Lena, and he began to envision his own act taking a spectacular new dimension. In 1924 Karl hired Joseph Geiger. Joe had thought he was answering an ad placed by the Flying Wallendas headed by Karl's father, Englebert Wallenda. Nevertheless, he joined Karl and remained a principal understander in the act for several decades. After Herman Wallenda joined, the group began to rehearse a trick wherein Joe and Herman were joined by a shoulder bar on which Karl balanced. After this was perfected, Lena was added standing on Karl's shoulders. The Wallendas traveled with Circus Gleich and when this three ring German circus played in Milan, Italy, at the Palazzio de la Sports, the first three-high verticle pyramid was performed on the high-wire.

The next two and one half years were occupied gaining fame in central Europe. When Lena left the act in Breslau where the Wallendas were displaying their thrill-filled stunts at Circus Busch, Karl bought an ad in *Das Artist* which sought a replacement. Youthful Helen Kries came to the rescue and the Great Wallendas were born. Karl Wallenda was the visionary innovator and decision maker of the act, but he was supported literally by Herman and Joe, while Helen added her daring and feminine charm.

At nearly the same time that Ringl-



The Ringling-Barnum Circus used this special litho for the Wallendas and the Grotelents starting in 1933. It was printed by Erie Litho Co. Circus World Museum Collection.

ing Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was settling into its new winter quarters in Sarasota after the 1927 season, the Wallenda Troupe was sailing for Havana, Cuba. There they opened on December 17 with Circo Santos y Artigas. A review which was published in *Billboard* the next week said, "... the strongest and best number on the bill was the closing for the first half, that of the Vallende (sic) Troupe, German performers, who do a difficult wire-walking act high up in the theater over a net and with the usual balancing poles." John Ringling contracted the Wallendas based on their performance in Havana.

April 5, 1928 marked a breakthrough in Karl's career. It was the beginning of 16 complete seasons with The Greatest Show on Earth (1928-1938 and 1942-1946). All reports of that historic opening make it shine as one of the all time great moments in show business.

Impressed with the vast array of talent that was on the program, Karl decided the Great Wallendas should work without a net or risk being overshadowed. The *New York Times* of April 16th confirms that indeed the Wallendas performed without a net the day before. The same review praises the Wallendas as the shining stars they were. The only other Ringling attraction which the reviewer thought was equally noteworthy, was Goliath the sea elephant who won the hearts of the children at the matinee. But at the night show, it was all Wallendas. The *Billboard* story of the Madison Square Garden debut explained, "Mr. Ringling has brought many new and remarkable acts to his enterprise, outstanding of which is the Wallenda Troupe. This is beyond the faintest doubt the greatest, most thrilling act..."

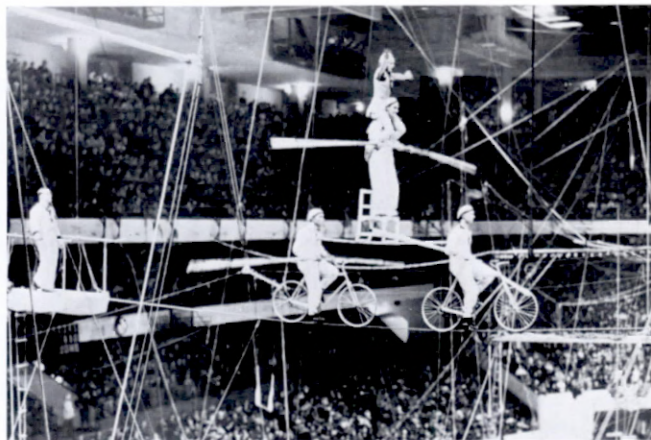
When the Great Wallendas took their last step onto the platform and began

to disassemble their three-high pyramid, the New York audience burst forth in a thunderous ovation of cheers and applause that ended only after Equestrian Director Fred Bradna escorted the four back into the ring 15 minutes later for an unprecedented bow. Years later, Karl described that night as the proudest moment in his career. Thus began a lasting mutual admiration between Karl and the American public.

In 1929, John Ringling hired the Rellmuths (Gretonas) to present a second high-wire act which would enable patrons in each hemisphere of the tent to see similar sensations. But Karl was not content with equality. He rebelled to the copied style of the Rellmuths' act and battled hard to make the Great Wallendas more sensational. A particularly difficult trick that Karl included in the routine was one where, with Herman and Joe balancing face to face on the wire, Karl placed one palm on the head of each, and raised up into a handstand.

Throughout the 1930's Karl booked the Great Wallendas with several Shrine and foreign circus programs. Among the more prominent Shrines to employ the Wallendas during this period were the Osman Temple in St. Paul, the Tigris Temple in Syracuse, the Boumi Temple in Baltimore, the Al Sirat Grotto Circus in Cleveland, the Moslem Temple in Detroit, and the Medinah Shrine Winter Circus in Chicago. One of the Wallendas' most successful winter engagements opened December 22, 1930 at Olympia, London. The Bertram Mills Circus presented a fabulous holiday season program that year. A *Billboard* review written by an Englishman affirmed, "Without doubt the thrill of the show is the Wallenda Troupe from your side. This act is absolutely the talk of London."

After the Bertram Mills stand, the Wallendas crossed the Channel and played at the Cirque d'Hiver. The February 22 issue of *Das Program* which reported Lillian Leitzel's death, had an ad for the Great Wallendas



Karl Wallenda is pictured with Helen on his shoulders during a 1934 performance in Madison Square Garden, New York City. Circus World Museum Collection.

which listed their European address as Bis 23. 2. 31. Paris, Cirque d'Hiver. The *Billboard* reported that the Wallendas were going to the Cirque d'Hiver on February 6th to replace Peejay and Swan Ringens as headliners. Thus it is apparent that the Wallendas were not at the Wintergarten on the same bill with Alfredo Codona, on that infamous date of Friday the 13th, 1931, as suggested earlier. But they did see him a short while later.

Before 1932, Karl had heightened the three-high finale by balancing on a box-like wooden chair in the middle of the pyramid. In 1932 after a repeat booking in London with the Bertram Mills Circus, and in Paris at the Cirque d'Hiver during February, Karl was ready to present yet another first on the high-wire. On April 8th in Madison Square Garden, Helen Kries began to stand erect on Karl's shoulders while the three-high pyramid moved across the wire.

In December, 1933, the Great Wallendas returned to their homeland and played the exquisite Wintergarten in Berlin. Germany's new Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, who had been appointed to office early the same year, joined the upper-class audience at the Wintergarten on New Year's Eve and reviewed the Wallenda's talent. Five and one half years later, Karl and his family would flee Europe due to the Fuhrer's ambitious aggression.

Following the Berlin engagement, the Great Wallendas played Barcelona, Spain, and the Krystal Palast in Leipzig, Germany. During these European dates, Karl, Helen, Joe, and Herman worked on another milestone in high-wire history. When they rejoined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey on March 30, 1934, Herman and Joe rode bicycles at the base of the three-high pyramid. Karl continued to prove himself to be a master at developing new routines.

When a vehicle outside the big top struck the stakes anchoring the Wallendas' rigging, the wire inside the tent slumped and the bicycle pyramid collapsed. This took place in Akron, Ohio, on July 11, 1934. Miraculously, none of the four fell. After he himself caught the wire, Karl saved Helen by grasping her in a scissor pinch catch with his legs as she fell past him. He held her that way until she could be dropped to safety. One year and one week later, Karl and Helen were married in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1935 they returned to the Bertram Mill Christmas Circus in London, and for some reason used the name "The Five Karrells."

In 1936 Karl and Helen purchased a house on Arlington Street in Sarasota so that they and their newborn daughter, Carla, would have a stationary home when they were not touring. But this was not often. As soon as Ringling ended its season, the Great Wallendas crossed over to Havana, Cuba. There in November, 1936, they began an extended winter engagement with Circo Santos y Artigas, the same circus that saw their first North American performance.

Also in 1936, Karl's brother Willy became the first high-wire Wallenda to be killed while performing. His bicycle's rear wheel was blown off the cable while he was working outdoors on September 12th at Liseberg Park in Goteborg, Sweden. He bounced out of a net and fell to his death.

Torrential rains soaked the lot at Schenectady, New York, prior to the visit of the circus on June 29, 1937. Because of the "funny" feel of the wire, Karl ruled against using the bicycles at the end of the act. Ralph Lill, the head property man, prepared for the worst and got extra men to help hold the Wallendas' net. But even with these precautions, without warning, the wire gave way when the "deadmen" were unearched by the weight of the pyramid. All four fell. Helen, falling from her high perch, nearly missed the net, but was deflected in by Lill's strong arms. Guy wires broke the falls of Karl, Helen, and Herman, but nevertheless, all three were carried out of the tent unconscious. The following day in Utica, when interviewed by the press, the Wallendas asserted that the act would go on that night as always. This was not the last time that Karl would demonstrate his courage and his belief that "the show must go on."

An appearance at the Wintergarten in January, 1938, was the Wallendas' last in Berlin before the war. Likewise, the 1938 season with Ringling was not followed by another the next year. A host of different employers kept the Karl Wallenda family employed in 1939. The most notable was the Tower Circus in Blackpool, England, where they thrilled audiences most of the summer. While at Blackpool, Karl



KRYSTALL-PALAST

This is a reproduction of a German photo that appeared on the program cover of the Krystall-Palast in Leipzig, in February of 1934. Circus World Museum Collection.

created a new sensation, the "pinwheel of death." Karl and Herman stood on the wire facing each other. They were connected by a shoulder bar about six feet long. On this pole, Helen and Elizabeth (Herman's first wife), held on with their hands behind their backs and spun in synchronized opposite

This handbill used by the TIVOLI, Hanover, Germany, to advertise the Wallendas in 1934. Circus World Museum Collection.

directions. This muscle grind was accomplished on the high-wire regularly from then on despite reservations by many that it was an impossible trick. When the Nazis began to claim their "Lebensraum" toward the end of the 1939 summer, the Great Wallendas wisely left England for home. Shortly thereafter, they became American citizens.

In addition to the usual winter shrine dates, the Wallendas worked many of George Hamid's bookings in 1940 and 1941. In 1942 Karl, Helen, Herman, Joe, and Henrietta Kries Grotefent (Helen's sister Yetty) were rehired by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. It is interesting to note that their contract granted the same income they had received in 1936, as well as what the Great Wallendas were to command in 1946. The difference was that the pay for the wire act was supplemented by another contract for an equilibristic act sometimes calling for as many as eleven people. This ladder act was another of Karl's productions which used the stage name of the Karrells. They first appeared with Ringling in 1944.

The disastrous Hartford fire on July 6, 1944, broke out as the Great Wallendas were ready to start their act high aloft in the big top. They had to make a hurried exit as the band of Merle Evans broke into the "Stars and Stripes Forever." None were injured except for Helen who was trampled over by the horrified crowd.

After the 1945 season Karl directed and produced his own show, the Great Continental Circus, which opened on December 1. It played indoors in eight Florida cities and was very successful. This success set in motion Karl's plans for another circus of his own. After his

TIVOLI

letztes Gastspiel vor ihrer Rückkehr nach Amerik



Die vier
Wallendas

Die größte
Weltsensation

aller Zeiten

Bis zum 15. März
täglich 4 und 8¹⁵ Uhr

Kleine Preise



ie 4 Wallendas wurden am 31. Dez. im Wintergarten Berlin von unserem Führer Adolf Hitler ausgezeichnet

last season with The Greatest Show on Earth in 1946, Karl formed the Independent Circus Corporation with his friend Jack Leontini, and Jack Kriegsman. The Wallenda Circus opened in Fort Myers, Florida, and made its way north playing predominately two day stands. The program included many Wallenda turns. Among them were the ten Karrells and the Wallenda high-wire act. During that spring, the first seven-man pyramids were presented. Crowned by Yetty Wallenda, the seven was one of Karl's most astonishing achievements. However, Karl's venture failed for lack of business and poor weather, and the short-lived Wallenda Circus closed in Greenville, South Carolina, on May 24.

For the next 15 years, Karl Wallenda trouped with a variety of shows presenting the seven-man pyramid. Included were E. K. Fernandez's Circus in Hawaii and other Shrine circuses from 1947 to 1949. In January, 1950, the Wallendas again went to Cuba, but most of 1950 was spent with Cole Bros. Circus until it closed in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, in mid season. The Great Wallendas preformed in the Cole Bros. Chicago Stadium Circus in 1951. In 1952, 1953, and 1954 Polack Bros. Circus employed Karl Wallenda's acts.

Wallenda's troupe toured South America with the Royal Dunbar Circus in 1955. This canvas circus traveled north from Columbia into Central America where the Wallendas experienced an earthquake in Nicaragua. A short time later they appeared with the Atayde Hnos. Circus in Mexico as they had previously done in late 1952 and were to do again during the holiday season of 1957-1958. Most of the time from 1956 thru 1958, Karl was with the Clyde Bros. Circus.

More and more, Karl Wallenda became involved in producing and promoting circuses. At Christmas time in 1958 he was with the King America Circus in Havana directing all of the aerial acts. One year later he was holding the same position with Tom Pack's Gran Circo Imperial in Mexico.

Helen Wallenda retired in 1959; Karl continued to perform. E. K. Fernandez provided another series of dates in 1960. In 1961 Clyde Beatty Cole Bros. produced a power packed show. The Wallendas enriched the show by joining for the first four eastern stands. After two weeks indoors, Beatty-Cole opened under canvas at the Palisades Amusement Park in New Jersey. Then it moved to Philadelphia for a highly profitable nine days. There on May 24, Monaco's Prince Ranier, Princess Grace, and their young children saw the show and marveled at Beatty's cat act and the Wallenda's seven-man pyramid.

During the 1950's several of the



The Wallenda and Grotefent troupes in the backyard of the Ringling-Barnum Circus, August 1, 1936, Chicago, Ill. Left to right, Arthur Troestl, George Grotefent,

Joe Geiger, Henrietta (Yetty) Kries, Helen Wallenda, Karl Wallenda, Eugene Black, Herman Wallenda and Arthur Grotefent. Circus World Museum Collection.

Wallenda pyramid understanders branched off on their own and Karl had to recruit replacements. But regardless of who worked in the act, Karl Wallenda's seven-man pyramid drew the eyes of seasoned performers as well as the awe-struck attention of millions who paid the price of admission. The high-wire would arc downward under the tremendous weight of four understanders, two middle men, and a chair-mounter. Once the eight feet halted in perfect unison near mid wire, the girl would slowly rise from her seated position and stand atop the chair. From any angle viewed, the numerous sway guy lines, and seven long restless flexible balance poles all drew the focus in on the triangular human ship of state. With no net below, the tension built up until individual coughs and random gasps became audible from the extremities of the arena.

Only one other group is known to have performed a seven person, three high pyramid. The Bob Gert Troupe presented the trick during the 1952-1953 Bertram Mills Christmas Circus in London, using a net.

Over 6,000 spectators went to the State Fair Coliseum in Detroit, Michigan, on the evening of January 30, 1962, to enjoy the Moslem Temple Shrine Circus. Clyde Beatty and the Wallendas were the two premier acts. At 9:30 the Wallendas began to build "the seven." Dieter Schepp was the first out on the 36 foot high-wire, followed by Dick Faughnan, Mario Wallenda, and Gunther Wallenda. Karl and Herman took their places on the spans created by the four understanders. Sixteen year old Jana Schepp took the chair position on the top span. The day before, Dieter had made his initial appearance in the seven-man pyramid. He and his sister, Jana, were Karl's nephew and niece

respectfully, via Karl's first wife, Martha. Karl had brought the Schepps to America from Germany shortly after Dieter had escaped from East Berlin to join his mother and sister.

Since 1947, the Wallenda's seven-man pyramid had been presented without a mishap. Then as the act was just beyond the half way point, it happened. The Great Wallendas fell. Jenny Wallenda, who had seen the accident from the platform that was to be the landing point, described what caused the tragic fall. In an interview printed in *The Detroit News* the following morning, she explained that Dieter appeared to be holding his balance pole with his finger tips and it began to slip loose. After exclaiming that he could not hold it any longer, he tossed the pole "into the air slightly to get a better grip." Then he lost control of the pole and crumbled under the weight. The entire pyramid was pulled down and forward.

Dieter and Richard Faughnan (Jenny's husband) were both killed. Karl and Helen's adopted son, Mario Kries Wallenda, was critically injured. Karl suffered multiple injuries, but still managed to remain on the wire where Jana landed on his back. He then held Jana momentarily until a tumbling mat was brought out to catch her. Herman and Gunther managed to balance on the wire. About 20 minutes later the performance resumed.

In two days, Karl still suffering from injuries and grief, returned to the act with Gunther, Herman, and Gene Mendez who had flown from New York the day before to augment the impaired act. Many people failed to understand what motivated the Wallendas to return to the high-wire after such a terrifying calamity. Karl probably spoke the truth as best he could when he explained that to him the high-wire was everything and "the rest of life is



Karl Wallenda and daughter, Carla, in the backyard of the Wallenda home in Sarasota, Fla., in 1942. Circus World Museum Collection.

just time to fill in between doing the act."

In the last half of April, 1962, the Wallendas with an abbreviated act, added another title to the list of circuses they have appeared with when they played the Palisades Amusement Park with King Bros. & Sells & Gray. Over Karl's illustrious career, his name appeared in programs of circuses with at least 40 different confirmable titles, not including individual Shrine Temples.

After the fatal fall of Yetty from her sway pole in Omaha, on April 18, 1963,

The Karrells ladder act was developed by Karl Wallenda in 1944 and was presented through 1952. Karl is shown doing a handstand on top. Circus World Museum Collection.



scuttlebutt again became preeminent that Karl Wallenda should retire. Rumors spread that the Wallendas had quarrelled among themselves over whether to go forward with the reenactment of the *seven* for an NBC television documentary. On November 3rd, the cameras recorded the 12 foot fall in the Wallendas' back yard which resulted when the cable slipped on a tree that it was anchored to. The peak of dissention had been reached. Gunther Wallenda quit the act. Others argued over whether to go on. But Karl's great pride, strong will, and eventual reassuring manner kept the act united.

The Fort Worth Shrine Circus was the occasion for the enactment of the last *seven*. There under a tremendous degree of tension which was intensified when the building lights were turned out during a rehearsal, the Great Wallendas achieved the distinction of returning to the high-wire with the trick that had brought them increased fame, money, and death. The Wallendas performed the last *seven* over a net 17 times and as they did, Karl's soothing commands could be heard throughout Will Rogers Memorial Coliseum. "Ready, out... we're doing fine." The patriarch of the high-wire had made his comeback.

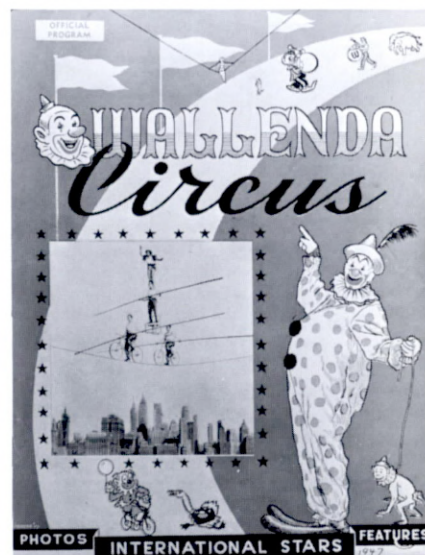
Herman Wallenda retired after the Fort Worth date and the four original Great Wallendas were now one. Carla Wallenda joined the star-studded cast of the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus in 1963 and remained for two seasons. Early in 1964, Karl returned to Detroit where he, Jenny, Louis Murillo, and Andy Anderson began a new act. Having put the past behind and anticipating several more years of performing for the American public, Karl declared that he was "the happiest man in the world."

Tom Pack's booked the Wallendas' high-wire act for a number of dates over the next three years. From February 24 to March 20, Karl was again in Puerto Rico for the Gran Circo Panamericano. Following this, Karl performed and directed more Shrine performances in the United States and then announced his retirement from the high-wire in November. However, Karl never did completely retire. In fact as early as February, 1967, he was back at it performing with his daughter, Carla.

During Karl's "retirement", he became more active in the Showfolks of Sarasota. He helped produce the Showfolks Circus and often he participated in the show with his family's wire act. Twice Karl Wallenda served as President of the Sarasota Showfolks organization of which he was a charter member. He and Helen could always be counted on by their many friends to assist at the Showfolks' social events. They even produced an annual steak

barbeque where Karl demonstrated his abilities as chef.

Over 1,000 people honored Karl Wallenda on November 1, 1970, at John Ringling's Ca' d' Zan as a "Sarasota Circus Celebrity." But honors and warm hearted reminiscence did not settle Karl's restless spirit. In fact, at age 65 he had just entered a new era of his career in the summer of 1970. To celebrate his 50th year on the silver strand, Karl Wallenda walked a 1,000 foot long cable across the Tallulah Falls Gorge in Georgia. Twice he stood on his head 750 feet in the air while bracing himself against the cable holding a special 40 foot long balance pole. Viewed by 35,000 people, Karl earned \$10,000 for the performance.



The program of the 1947 Wallenda Circus used a 1933 photo of the act. Circus World Museum Collection.

Skywalks became his new trademark. In June, 1971, Karl crossed Busch Memorial Stadium in St. Louis as part of Tom Pack's Circus. Each performance from June 18 to June 21 he walked the 600 foot diameter of the stadium on a cable 150 foot high. As a new twist he spoke to the audience with the aid of a microphone while he walked. A month later Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium was the scene of similar skywalks for Tom Pack's outdoor circus.

While performing a 480 foot long skywalk on July 28, 1972, at the Osiris Shrine Circus in Wheeling, West Virginia, Karl witnessed the death of his son-in-law, "Chico" Guzman. Guzman was climbing a stadium light tower to help with Karl's balance pole, when he brushed an electric clamp and fell.

It took Wallenda 17 minutes to cross Philadelphia's Veterans Stadium on August 13, 1972. The wire was not guyed well and its sway made balance



First presented in the spring of 1947, the seven-man pyramid is shown here in 1950 with Yetty as top mounter. Circus World Museum Collection.

difficult. Still, Karl accomplished a headstand at midfield between games of a National League double-header, and was paid \$3,000. In September, Atlanta was the site of yet another skywalk, this one for the Atlanta Braves baseball organization.

"More Skywalks" became a familiar headline. This publicity raised the demand for Karl's appearances. More numerous and more diverse engagements were booked despite his advancing age. Among them was the opening date of the Baltimore City Fair on September 21, 1973. To help kick off the celebration Karl Wallenda paced across a 600 foot long high-wire rigged between two crane booms over the Baltimore harbor.

After a skywalk for the Cleveland Indians in May, 1974, Wallenda teamed up with Paul Kaye and Jack Leontini to produce and promote Circus America in the Capitol Center near Washington, D.C. There for three weeks in April their circus played day and date with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Red, and the likes of an old style press agents' battle was re-created. Both shows had successful stands.

On May 25, 1974, The Great Wallenda set a world's record distance walk on the high-wire by walking 1,800 feet at a height of 60 feet. This event was a promotion for the Grand Opening of the King's Island Amusement Park in Ohio.

The next two years were spent in the typical Karl Wallenda manner. He lost his baseball cap doing a headstand on a wire high above Milwaukee County Stadium in 1974. There was a skywalk at San Diego Stadium in 1975. There were repeat strolls across the stadiums in Cleveland (1975),



During the 1961 season the Wallendas were featured with the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus. The seven man is shown here in Commack Arena, Long Island, N.Y. Pfening Collection.

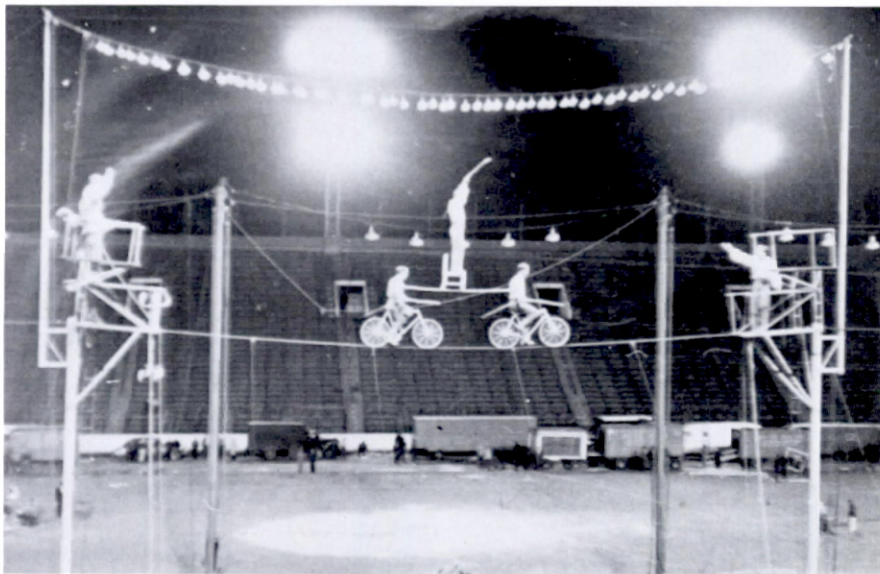
Philadelphia (1976) and Atlanta (1976 and 1977). There was a 300 by 90 foot hike above the Thames River in London. In 1975 Karl aided in the fight against a proposed zoning regulation which would have band storage of circus equipment in residential areas

During the 1950 season the Wallendas made their first appearance with Cole Bros. Circus. This photo was taken of the Cole show in Buffalo, N.Y. They appeared again with Cole in 1951 in Chicago, Ill. Pfening Collection.

in Sarasota. He continued his active involvement with the Sarasota Show-folks Circus. And on January 18, 1976, a full house turned out to honor Karl at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota.

A night-time skywalk between the tops of two Miami Beach hotels in January, 1977, was a featured attraction on a live Evil Knievel television special. Flood lights which nearly blinded Karl made him appear on the screens like a glowing celestial body.

Karl Wallenda and the Wallenda family were billed on specially printed "paper" as "living legends of the high-wire" who would flaunt death at Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Thrill Circus at the Ohio State Fair last summer. This novel and successful



Irvin and Ken Feld produced venture gave Karl Wallenda the distinction of being one of the few men to have performed for all three major generations of Ringling-Barnum producers: Ringling, North, and Feld.

In the Fall of 1977 the movie *The Great Wallendas* was filmed in part in Sarasota. Due to Karl's persuading, the Showfolks Circus at Roberts Sports Arena was chosen by NBC for the background footage. Because of the connection with the movie and the Wallendas, the Showfolks Circus netted record profits on November 16 and 17. Wallenda fell 20 feet in his backyard while practicing for the Showfolk's Circus. He fractured a vertebra and therefore was unable to perform. But the last seven-man pyramid which was recreated for the telemovie, was constructed under the leadership of its originator.

When *The Great Wallendas* was aired in February, 1978, it was evident that Lloyd Bridges had excelled in portraying Karl as a proud and courageous man. On the other hand, the movie failed to make it known to the viewer that these high-wire performers had challenged death successfully for over 40 years. To the contrary, the movie left the impression that Karl Wallenda's pyramid fell in Detroit after only a few months practice.

In December, 1977, the Wallendas competed at the Circus World Championships in London. With many



A happy Karl Wallenda is shown holding the trophy presented to him by the Circus Historical Society during the CHS convention held in Sarasota, Fla., February 1977. Cliff Glotzbach photo.

bookings for the spring and summer of 1978, there was no indication that Karl would slow down. He went to San Juan, Puerto Rico, to perform at Circo Pan Americano with his granddaughter, 17 year-old Rietta. Once again to promote a circus, he stepped onto the high-wire, this time strung between two downtown hotels. Part way across, the end came with shocking speed. A combination of factors including gusting wind, mis-placed guy wires, and Karl's balance pole interfering with his attempted grasp of the wire, caused the 120 foot fall. Perhaps Karl's health and 73 years of age also contributed to the accident which caused his death. But as Karl himself believed, it might simply have been his time to go.

He once commented, "It makes you happy to know that the people like and admire you." Liked and admired he certainly was. Symbolic of the ideal that "the show must go on", Karl Wallenda at only 5'6" stands tall among all circus greats. Although he did not invent the high-wire, his imagination, his pursuance, and his presentation of startling new displays, decade after decade, single him out not only as the father of the modern high-wire act, but also as the king. Football coach Vince Lombardi once said, "The greatest accomplishment is not in never falling, but in rising again after you fall." Karl Wallenda rose to the top with triumphant proficiency and climbed back after the catastrophic falls. His memory lives on.

THE GREAT CIRCUS STREET PARADE IN PICTURES

Chappie Fox and F. Beverly Kelley, giants in the circus writing field, have co-authored this book for late January publication, so you know it's great. It's all here, from elegant equestrians to screaming callopie, in its 175 very rare and unusual photographs, 95% of which have never been previously published. It's 144 pages, 8¾ x 9¼ in., 175 black-and-white illustrations, of beautiful and thrilling circus parade description.

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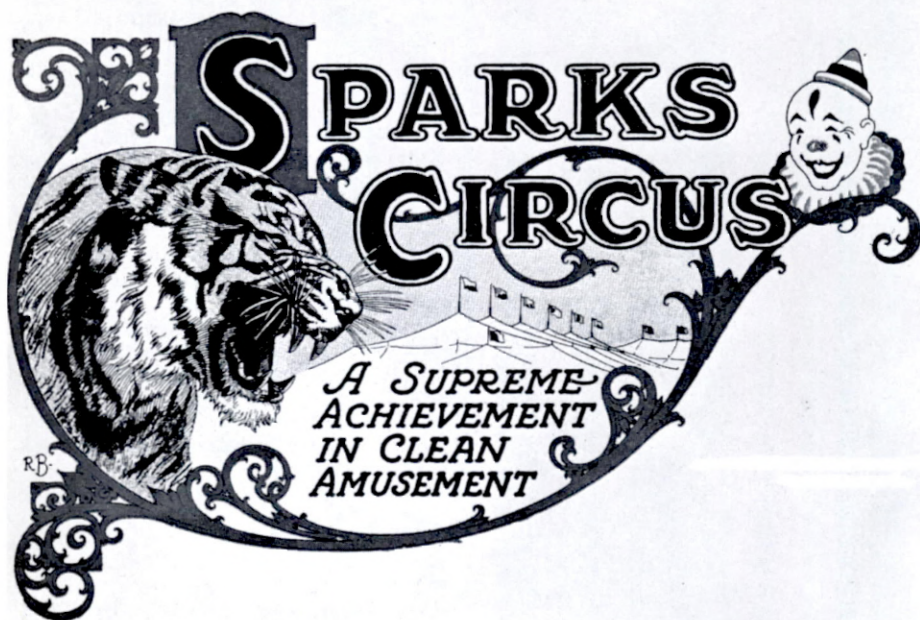
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ROLAND BUTLER, GENERAL PRESS REPRESENTATIVE



The Sparks Circus - through 1928

By Gordon M. Carver

Season of 1923

The year 1923 was to see big changes in Sparks Circus. First, it was to make what amounted to a 50% increase in size by adding three 72 foot flats to the six then in use, making nine flats and bringing the total cars from 15 to 20. The other major change was the addition of a steel arena in the center ring and three wild animal acts to the big show. These, together with two separate liberty horse acts, made for an outstanding improvement in the show and put it in a class to compete with any other on the road.

News of the arrival in Macon winter-quarters of tents, railroad cars, wagons and animals for this enlarged show, filled the early issues of *The Billboard* in 1923. It was the busiest time of Charles Sparks' life. The United States was embarking on boom years and he was about to take full advantage of it.

The new big top, a 130 foot round with three 40 foot middles, as well as other canvas, came from the Fulton Tent & Bag Co. The big top had two rows of quarter poles, with ten high reserve starbacks and 15 high blues. This left a rather narrow track but still wide enough to accommodate high school horses and a fox hunt scene with high jumping horses. The menagerie was 60 foot round with three 30 foot middles.

Both of these tents were only slightly larger than those used the previous year and not as large as those that would be used in the future. The side show top was a 50 foot round with two 30 foot middles, the same size as had been used for the last few years.

Arriving next were the three new flats and a stock car from the Mt. Vernon Car Mfg. Co., all painted orange. The flats were loaded with wagons and cages picked up enroute from the Bode Wagon Co. of Cincinnati and the Moeller Wagon Works of Baraboo. Also arriving was a fifth coach to accommodate the increased personnel. All of the cars this year

The complete layout of the Sparks Circus shows side show, menagerie, and big tops, one behind the other. The snake pit show is at the right with cage No. 10 in front of it. Pfening collection.



This letterhead was drawn by Roland Butler and first used in 1923. The Sparks' paper appears to have been the first circus letterhead design drawn by Butler. The title is red outlined in black, the scroll work is gold and the tiger is red and black. Pfening collection.

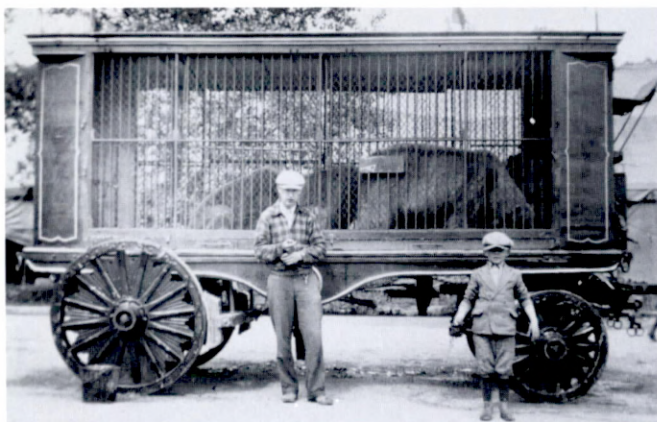
were painted orange except two of the old stocks which remained yellow; there not being enough time to give them a new coat of paint before the season opened.

Among the animals to arrive were a sixteen horse liberty horse act, eight dapples and eight grays, with their trainer, Prof. Ernest Kloske, from the Hagenbeck Zoo in Stellingen, Germany, along with a group of ponies, great dane dogs and polar bears, and a group of tigers. Also coming were their trainers and grooms. Plans had also been made for a leopard act, but at the last moment these plans were changed, and while the leopards arrived they were never used in the performance. However, a fighting lion (5) act trained by Steve Batty which had been used in Hollywood to make some Tarzan pictures did arrive and was used in the show.

Among the wagons to arrive from the Moeller Wagon Works was a stringer wagon, the show's first, stringers and poles having been formerly loaded on the same wagon. Also received from Moeller were two other baggage wagons, one tableau and one cage. The cage, No. 10, was a 16 footer with no corner carvings. The tableau wagon was the Dolphin. This wagon is somewhat controversial, as there has been suggestion that the wagon was built in 1910 for the revived Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus by the Moeller Brothers. However, extensive research fails to locate any photographs of the Dolphin wagon on the Forepaugh Sells show, nor are there any written references to the wagon being connected to that circus.

Three corner statute cages came from the Bode Wagon Works. These were 16 ft. in length, the largest that Sparks would ever have. One was number 12 and one was number 14, the number of the third cage is unknown. Some additional baggage wagons were also delivered by Bode for the 1923 season. The Bode wagons were, as previously indicated, loaded onto the new flats enroute to Macon.

With the acquisition of the Dolphin

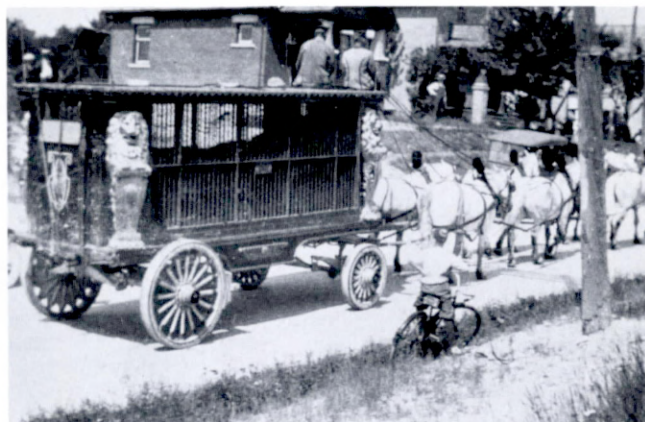


This 16 ft. cage, No. 10, is believed to have been built by Moeller Bros., Baraboo, Wis., and delivered to the show in 1923. The only carving is an "S" that appears on the mudboard behind the man in the center. This "S" carving is like the ones on the cages delivered in 1922. Woodcock collection.

tab and the two remaining old tabs, the Sea Serpent and the Two Indians were disposed of. The Two Indians went to the Kings for use on their new Gentry show in 1925, and may have remained in Macon until that year. We do not know what became of the Sea Serpent. This left the show with three more or less new tabs plus the older but still good Dancing Girls tab.

One rather unusual wagon was constructed in Macon. This was a shifting den. Instead of using a runway, the wild animals were moved from their cages in the menagerie into the shifting den which was then pulled into the big top and they were then transferred from this wagon into the steel arena. The return trip was, of course, made in the same way. This clumsy and awkward system was used only in 1923. Thereafter, the animals were transferred directly from the

The second Bode cage is No. 14, with corner statues of adult male figures. Pfening collection.



The first of the three 16 ft. cages delivered to Sparks from Bode is No. 12, with large corner statues of lions. Pfening collection.

Phillips, ring stock; and Louis Reed, elephants.

The 1923 season opened as usual in Macon, Georgia, Thursday, April 5, to two capacity crowds. All the businesses and schools were closed for half a day and the various civic clubs participated with the show in getting orphans and other under-privileged children to the show. *The Macon Daily Telegraph* devoted almost its entire issue of that date to show and opening day. Circus day in no other town was quite like it.

Then at 10:30 the parade left the fairgrounds, where its winter quarters were and where the tents were pitched, for the downtown. The order of march was as follows:

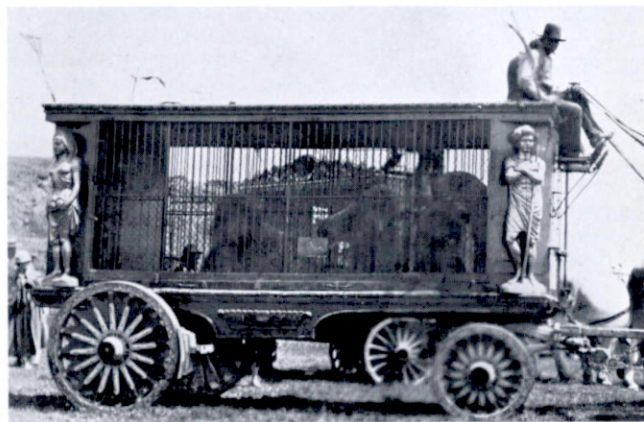
Two mounted heralds with American flags

Red and gold Dancing Girls tab with the Jack Phillips and his big show band, 8 horse hitch

13 mounted riders

Girl and Horsehead tab with

The third Bode cage delivered to Sparks in 1923 had corner statues of a shepherd boy in front and a girl at the rear. The number of this cage is unknown. Eddie Jackson photo.



Japanese in oriental costumes riding on top, 6 horse hitch

Orange den with ostriches, 4 horse hitch

Green den with axis deer, 4 horse hitch

Red air calliope, 8 pony hitch

Green corner statute den with tigers, 6 horse hitch

Dark blue and silver den with monkeys, 4 horse hitch

3 riders

Red den with kangaroos, 4 horse hitch

Clown band on the Clowns Behind the Curtains tab, 6 horse hitch

Two 2-horse tandems with riders

Two 3-horse tandems with riders

Yellow corner statute den with polar bears, 6 horse hitch

Clown mule tandem

Blue den with sea lions, 4 horse hitch

Red den with leopards, 4 horse hitch

Side show band on the Dolphins tab, 8 horse hitch

Four wild west riders

Red plain corner den with lions, 6 horse hitch

White den with black leopard and tiger, 4 horse hitch

Four camels, two zebras, six elephants

Red and gold steam calliope, 8 horse hitch

To recapitulate, in the parade there were:

4 tableaux wagons

11 cages (two left on the lot)

2 calliopes

16 total wagons

86 draft horses

8 ponies

32 ring stock

2 mules

4 camels

2 zebras

6 elephants

All this parade was about three quarters of a mile in length and took about fifteen minutes to pass in a very substantial exhibit. It will be noted that at least here in the home town all the cages were open. The three bands and two calliopes made plenty of music.

Following the parade to the show grounds the visitor, if he had known the Sparks Circus in past years, would have noticed the difference in appearance from former years. The



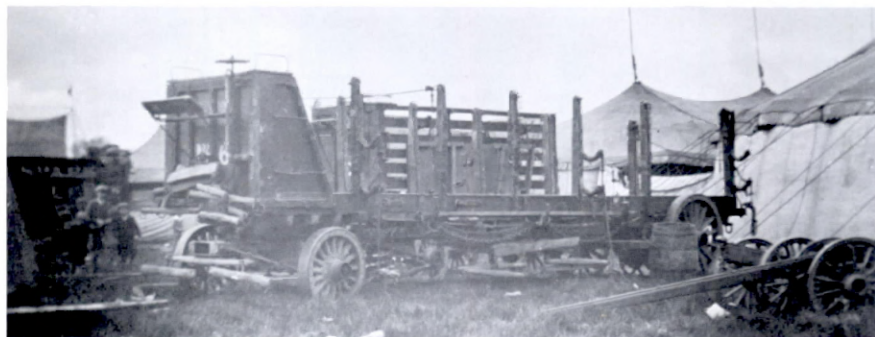
Franz Woska, first appeared with Sparks in 1923, presented trained tigers. He is shown here with clown Minert DeOrlo in 1923. Woodcock collection.

side show bannerline was longer. There were ten banners in addition to the entrance banner. There was no pit show and now there were two ticket wagons, the office wagon the show had used for several years and the Clown Behind the Curtains tab which sold reserved seat tickets. But there was still only one candy stand.

In the side show, admission to which was now 25¢, the ten acts were a little crowded, for the tent was still only the 50 foot round with two 30 foot middles that was the same size as had been used in recent years for only seven or eight acts. This year there was the usual band and minstrel show, an illusion act, Punch and Judy, a sword walker, Indian Dervish, fire eater, accordion player, tramp juggler, snake charmer and trained cockatoos. These were all "novelty" acts. As was Sparks' custom up to that time, there were no freaks or "strange people."

In the menagerie top, only slightly

The No. 6 big top pole wagon was delivered to the Sparks show in 1922, from Moeller Bros. Pfening collection.



larger than in previous years, there were crowded the twelve cages, five more than formerly, and three of them the larger 16 foot cages—all the other cages on the show being only 12 feet. Also there were the four camels, one a baby, two zebras and six large elephants, all of whom had been in the parade, as well as three llamas, one of which was a baby and did not parade. There was a concession stand where drinks and peanuts were sold. All soft drinks, peanuts, ice cream cones and similar concessions were a standard 5¢. Even for this date, these prices were cheap, for most circuses were getting 10¢ for such items.

For the first time the big show performance was given in three rings with the steel arena occupying the center ring for the seven opening numbers, after which it was dismantled and the three rings were used for ground acts. This year the program was not only stronger than formerly, but longer with twenty-one numbers, about three or four more than before. The program ran about twenty or twenty-five minutes longer or a little over two hours. All this action could be seen for 75¢ for adults and only 30¢ for children, with a reserved seat in the starbacks 50¢ extra.

The program was as follows:

No. 1—Spec "Old King Tut" with Bessie Harvey, prima donna, doing the vocals. For all practical purposes this was a rehash and renaming of the 1922 spec. It was probably one of the weaker parts of the show but served to get it started.

No. 2—Clyde Widener and his hurdle mule; Bert Mayo with his mile-a-minute pony on the revolving table on the track in front of the steel arena; Dynamite, the bucking mule; and Paul Wenzel, producing clown, with all the clowns in walkarounds on the track.

No. 3—Six horse liberty act, Prof. Sharber, trainer; in the arena, Carl Wolff with four polar bears, two ponies and two great dane dogs; six horse liberty act, Prof. Ernest Kloske, trainer. These two six horse liberty acts were combined later in the show into the 16 horse act.

No. 4—Three Nelsons, acrobats; Koban brothers, oriental acrobats.

No. 5—Sparks performing Bengal tigers (6), Franz Woska, trainer.

No. 6—Sparks famous elephants, three in each end ring, trained by Louis Reed and performed by Madge Fuller and Anna Carey. They worked very fast in a clever routine.

No. 7—Sparks' jungle bred lions (5), one of America's greatest fighting lion acts trained by Steve Batty.

No. 8—Performing elephants and ponies in rings one and three worked by the Misses Bailey and Harris.

No. 9—In three rings ladies and gentlemen's principal riding and somersaulting by Flora Guice, Melvin Hollis and Bessie Hollis.

No. 10—Japanese foot slide on a slender rope from the top of the tent to the ground by Prince Sakato.

No. 11—Naida Miller, dancing and speed queen on the tight wire. This act compared favorably with much the same format and skill as that of the famous Bird Millman on the Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey show.

No. 12—Bessie Harvey, song bird of the big tops, and her trained pigeons. This act was patterned somewhat after Ella Bradna's act also on the Ringling-Barnum show.

No. 13—Sparks rotation horses, a group of 16 horses, direct from Germany, trained and performed by Prof. Ernest Kloske. There were eight dapples and eight grays in this group of splendidly trained liberty horses, prepared for the ring by the same trainer who trained the Ringling-Barnum liberty horses. No show had a better liberty horse act than this.

No. 14—Pete Mardo trio in comedy acrobatics; the Nelson Comedy Company in bumps and falls.

No. 15—Japanese shoulder perch act by Eno and Totsu; Japanese foot perch by Sakato and Yamada.

No. 16—The Three Walters (Guice, Kent and Cherry) in an aerial bar act that was one of the best in the business.

No. 17—Sparks high school horses with one of America's premier horsewomen, Minnie Thompson, riding Baron Dubell on the hipodrome track, together with Myrtle Mayo, Madge Fuller, Frances Widener, Lucille Aumann and Dorothy Batty in the rings.

No. 18—Tom Burns and his Bibb County pigs; Capt. Tiebor's educated musical sea lions in an act that would later be featured in Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Combined Show; Walter Scharube with a mixed group of llamas, ponies, and monkeys.

No. 19—Guice-Hollis troupe in comedy bareback riding.

No. 20—Feats of dental dexterity (iron jaw) by Madge Fuller and Kula York over rings one and three.

No. 21—English hunting scene with high jumping and broad jumping horses and fox hounds with fourteen horses taking part.

After the main show a concert was presented for another 25¢ with everyone sitting in the reserved seat section. In addition to Weaver Gray and his cowboys and cowgirls putting on the usual wild west riding and lassoing events, Tommy Mullen, ex-middleweight boxing champion, and Kid Hamilton, lightweight wrestling champion, met any and all comers in the ring or on the mat as an "added attraction".

Two packed houses helped start the season at Macon, and the same business greeted the show at the next two stands, Columbus and Griffin, Ga. From there the show moved rapidly north through Tennessee (in Chat-

Ring Out the Old— Ring In the New

Last Summer the residents of Kokomo were surprised and delighted with the Al G. Barnes Circus which came here as a stranger and made many staunch friends because it presented something **NEW**. At that time Kokomo unanimously agreed that old-time circuses and moss-covered circus ideas were a thing of the past.

On next Monday, August 13th, another circus **NEW** to this city will make its initial bow to Kokomo — **THE SPARKS CIRCUS**.

With a thousand and one features **NEW** to circus audiences, the big Sparks show is coming here. Surprise after surprise and novelty upon novelty will predominate in its performances.

NEW Blood, **NEW** Ideas, **NEW** Equipment, **NEW** Faces and **New** Inventions will everywhere be evidenced. It's the last word in up-to-the minute circus achievement.

The SPARKS CIRCUS is not 100 years old. It doesn't operate as circuses did in 1823 and furthermore it doesn't want to. It has no century-old cobwebbed attractions or circus paraphernalia that should have long since been relegated to the dust bins of antiquity. It's a circus of 20th Century PEP, just 100 years ahead of any other circus coming within hailing distance of Kokomo this season — and above all it's **NEW**.

ALL HANDS UP

For the Great Big, All-New, "Class A"

Sparks Circus

Coming to the Virginia Ave. Grounds

**KOKOMO
SATURDAY,
AUGUST 13**

Note: The enlargement alone of the Sparks Circus this season represents greater financial outlay than the total cost of any 100-year-old circus that ever rattled and squeaked on the North American continent.

This unusual newspaper ad was used by Sparks for the August 13, 1923, stand in Kokomo, Ind. It had all the earmarks of a Butler creation. Pfening collection.

tanooga it got rave notices, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Maryland. At the start of the fourth week it was into Pennsylvania, where it stayed about two weeks before one date in New Jersey at Plainfield, and four in New York, including Troy, where a local

reviewer called it "a corking good show". A bad train movement coming in from Gloversville delayed arrival of the show until 8 a.m. and, followed by a long haul to the lot, kept the parade from getting downtown until 2:30 and back to the lot at 3:30. The show started at 4:10. Little was cut from the performance, it getting out about 6 p.m. Because of the late start the afternoon audience was not good, but the evening show was capacity.

J.M. Randolph, manager of the advance car this year, had a crew of twenty that put up plenty of paper. On the car was a mailing expert to handle the mailing pieces for the country routes, a boss billposter, chief bannerman, two lithographers, and nine billposters, a chef, a pastemaker and a truck driver. The truck driver was a new addition and meant that more country barns were going to be protected for the winter. It is also interesting that they were again feeding the crew on the car.

The show moved into New England at North Adams, Mass., on May 23, and stayed in that area through July 21 at Brattleboro, Vt. At Willimantic, Ct., near Bridgeport, where Jim Thomas, famous forty horse driver on Barnum & Bailey lived, the "fine horses that Charley Sparks has on his show" proved too much for him and he joined. Then, two and a half weeks later, on July 9, at Bangor, Me., Jake Bosey joined to take charge of the draft stock as a replacement for James Irving who had left. A few days later at Claremont, N.H., the show got the largest crowds of any circus that had ever played there.

After Sparks closed the New England tour at Brattleboro, it quickly moved through New York and Pennsylvania, to arrive in Steubenville, Ohio, on Sunday, July 30, for a show the next day. But getting out of the town was another problem. There were very bad hills between the lot and the runs and it was necessary to hire several trucks to be hooked onto the rear of the wagons to hold them back. The result of this slow process was that the show was not loaded onto the cars until 4 a.m. Fortunately, the run to the next stand, East Liverpool, was a short one of only about twenty miles.

After two weeks in Ohio, and one in Indiana, they moved into Wisconsin, August 20, at Kenosha. Here the afternoon was crowded and there were a thousand seated on the straw at the evening show. At Kenosha, Sparks also closed a deal with Mr. Driver of the Driver Tent & Awning Co., for a new big top for 1924, a 130 foot round with three 50 foot middles, a little larger than the 1923 top. Also a larger menagerie top, a 70 foot round with four 40 foot middles, was ordered. Earl Chapin May, the well-known circus writer and historian, visited here and to entertain him, Charles Sparks

played drums in the band at the matinee. Kenosha was a busy place, for in addition to the foregoing, two leopards from the Benson Wild Animal Farms arrived, as did a young tiger, formerly a Princeton University mascot, a gift from a Mr. Howard.

While loading at Cape Girardeau, Mo., September 10, a wagon broke down, causing a long delay in leaving the town. The result was that the show did not arrive in Walnut Ridge, Ark., until 1 p.m., so that an evening show only was given. There was no parade. The town was packed with people, many of whom were disappointed by the cancellations. It was reported that there were 5,000 at the evening show.

The season closed at Savannah, Ga., Monday, December 10, its 214th working day of the season. The show was under the auspices of the Elks. Both shows were capacity with evening performance having people on the straw. The side show broke records for a closing date. The return to winter-quarters at Macon completed a tour of 15,261 miles.

SPARKS CIRCUS ROUTE 1923

April

5, Macon, Ga.; 6, Columbus; 7, Griffin; S; 9, Chattanooga, Tenn.; 10, Murfreesboro; 11, Clarksville; 12, Madisonville, Ky.; 13, Russellville; 14, Bowling Green; S; 16, Richmond; 17, Maysville; 18, Ashland; 19, Logan, W. Va.; 20, Huntington; 21, Charleston; S; 23, Beckley; 24, Ronceverte; 25, Marlinton; 26, Elkins; 27, Cumberland, Md.; 28, Somerset, Pa.; S; 30, Clarksburg, W. Va.

May

1, Fairmont; 2, Morgantown; 3, Uniontown, Pa.; 4, Vandergrift; 5, Charleroi; S; 7, Clearfield; 8, Williamsport; 9, Shamokin; 10, Sunbury; 11, Lancaster; 12, Lebanon; S; 14, Mt. Carmel; 15, Hazelton; 16, Bethlehem; 17, Plainfield, N.J.; 18, Newburgh, N.Y.; 19, Kingston; S; 21, Gloversville; 22, Troy; 23, North Adams, Mass.; 24, Holyoke; 25, Greenfield; 26, Keene, N.H.; S; 28, Fitchburg, Mass.; 29, Lynn; 30, Maynard; 31, Lowell.

June

1, Haverhill; 2, Salem; S; 4, Manchester, N.H.; 5, Concord; 6, Nashua; 7, Bellows Falls, Vt.; 8, Rutland; 9, Glens Falls, N.Y.; S; 11, Peekskill; 12, White Plains; 13, Mt. Vernon; 14, Stamford, Conn.; 15, South Norwalk; 16, Danbury; S; 18, Ansonia; 19, Meriden; 20, New Britain; 21, Middletown; 22, Willimantic; 23, Norwich; S; 25, New London; 26, Putnam; 27, Woonsocket, R.I.; 28, Newport; 29, Brockton, Mass.; 30, Taunton.

July

2, Gloucester; 3, Dover, N.H.; 4, Portland, Me.; 5, Rumford; 6, Lewiston; 7, Madison; S; 9, Bangor; 10, Waterville; 11, Augusta; 12, Biddeford; 13, Sanford; 14, Laconia, N.H.; S; 16, Berlin; 17, Littleton; 18, Woodsville; 19, Lebanon; 20, Claremont; 21, Brattleboro, Vt.; S; 23, Little Falls, N.Y.; 24, Lyons; 25, Mt. Morris; 26, Olean; 27, Kane, Pa.; 28, Brooksville; 30, Steubenville, O.; 31, East Liverpool.

August

1, Bellaire; 2, Cambridge; 3, Ulrichsville; 4, Lancaster; S; 6, Wilmington; 7, Middletown; 8, London; 9, Springfield; 10, Greenville; 11, Anderson, Ind.; S; 13, Kokomo; 14, Muncie; 15, Marion; 16, Warsaw; 17, Plymouth; 18, Valparaiso; S; 20, Kenosha, Wis.; 21, Racine; 22, Sheboygan; 23, Green Bay; 24, Appleton; 25, Oshkosh; S; 27, Madison; 28, Baraboo; 29, LaCrosse; 30, Beaver Dam; 31, Watertown.

September

1, Richland Center; S; 3, Galesburg, Ill.; 4, Canton; 5, Pekin; 6, Litchfield; 7, Alton; 8, Granite City; S; 10, Cape Girardeau, Mo.; 11, Walnut Ridge, Ark.; 12, Little Rock; 13, Hot Springs; 14, Conway; 15, Russellville; S; 17, Pine Bluff; 18, Brinkley; 19, Jonesboro; 20, Blythesville; 21, Sikeston, Mo.; 22, Caruthersville; S; 24, Clarksdale.



Roland Butler made a few small changes in the design of the Sparks' roto courier for the 1923 season. This design was used for the following three or four years. Pfening collection.

Miss.; 25, Greenville; 26, Vicksburg; 27, Natchez; 28, Brookhaven; 29, McComb; S.

October

1, Hammond, La.; 2, Bogalusa; 3, Columbia, Miss.; 4, Hattiesburg; 5, Meridian; 6, Starkville; S; 8, Tuscaloosa, Ala.; 9, Columbus, Miss.; 10, Jasper, Ala.; 11, Aberdeen, Miss.; 12, Holly Springs; 13, Water Valley; S; 15, Jackson, Tenn.; 16, Corinth, Miss.; 17, Florence, Ala.; 18, Huntsville; 19, Decatur; 20, Pulaski, Tenn.; 22, Columbia; 23, Cullman, Ala.; 24, Gadsden; 25, Anniston; 26, Rome, Ga.; 27, Gainesville; S; 29, Gaffney, S.C.; 30, Shelby, N.C.; 31, Monroe.

November

1, Laurenburg; 2, Lumberton; 3, Sanford; S; 5, Hesperdon; 6, Weldon; 7, Rocky Mount; 8, Washington; 9, Kinston; 10, New Bern; S; 12, Wilmington; 13, Florence, S.C.; 14, Columbia; 15, Clinton; 16, Abbeville; 17, Elberton, Ga.; S; 19, Athens; 20, Washington; 21, Augusta; 22, Vidalia; 23, Valdosta; 24, Gainesville; S; 26, St. Petersburg, Fla.; 27, Tampa; 28, Bradenton; 29, Lakeland; 30, Orlando.

December

1, Sanford; S; 3, Miami; 4, Miami; 5, West Palm Beach; 6, Ft. Pierce; 7, Daytona; 8, St. Augustine; S; 10, Savannah, Ga.

Season Ends. Total mileage: 15,261 miles.

*See description

Season of 1924

The big news in the early weeks of 1924 was that Sparks Circus was again going to enlarge and go to 25 cars. Of course, we now know that this was pure gossip and rumor, the kind so popular in the outdoor show world, for the show would stay at 20 cars, the same as in 1923.

However, there is evidence that the show may have added two more tab wagons to its roster of wagons. A letter to Moeller Bros. of Baraboo, dated January 1, 1924, signed by Charles Sparks said, and I quote the entire letter, "When you ship the wagons, I

want you to ship me 14 poles for our wagons. These poles are not to be ironed. Notice the total length of these poles are 14 feet. Also send an extra pole with each wagon you build. Put these poles inside of the wagon and if possible put five seats on the tableau that you are building. If you can't get five seats on, make four. We must have four seats. Send me a bill for the extra poles." Then the February 9 *Billboard* said that several new wagons, including a tableau, had been built at winterquarters.

The reference to these two new tab wagons is most puzzling for, so far as all other records show, the show at this time already had all the tab wagons it would ever have. The *Billboard* reference to a tab wagon being built in winterquarters could be an error or a misunderstanding concerning the arrival of the tab and other wagons from Baraboo. Or it could have been an "elaboration" of the refurbishing of one of the older tabs that the show already owned. However, the reference to a tab in Sparks' letter to Moeller Bros. is another matter. We can only speculate that order for this wagon was later cancelled or that it was sold to some other show before it was delivered to Sparks. While the *Billboard* carried two full reviews of the performance, covered here later, no review of the parade in any detail was given so we have no way of validating or refuting any of this.

The show was planning again for its opening in Macon, this year to be on Thursday, April 3. The advance car, with Jim Randolph back as Manager, left March 22, after billing Macon and its environs, for the first road stand at Atlanta, where the show would again play a two day stand on April 4-5. The advance car had much the same crew of 20 men, including the truck driver, as in 1923. However, the cook was missing and they had again given up serving meals on the car.

At the opening, Macon gave the show two turnaway shows. The performances were under the auspices of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. As had become the practice, all schools and businesses were closed for the afternoon. Several local bands and marching groups led the parade through the downtown area.

The performance under the direction of Bert Mayo opened with a "gorgeous" spectacle founded on the ancient Egyptian king Tuthankamen and entitled "An Egyptian Fantasy". This was somewhat more elaborate than the 1923 spec. The costumes were all new and reported to have cost \$15,000. However that may be, we know that they were all designed and executed in Macon by, and under the direction of, Vera and Addie Sparks. Bessie Harvey was again prima donna, but she was supported by Hazel Bailey, soprano and Karl Mosher, tenor. There were

several dancers, including Frieda Schroude formerly of the Circus Schuman, and the Circus Hagenbeck in Germany. All the elephants, camels, zebras, llamas and horses appeared, and all were elaborately blanketed. The program continued with:

No. 2—Clyde Widener's hurdle mule and clowns in ring 1; Bert Mayo's mile a minute pony on the revolving table in the center ring; Dynamite, the unrideable mule in ring 3; the entire track was occupied by clowns with some new walkarounds featuring Paul Wentzell's and Pete Mardo's original numbers.

No. 3—Franz Woska's five polar bears and two great dane dogs gave a wonderful performance in the steel arena.

No. 4—Prof. Kloske's six sorrel liberty horses and Vladimir Schroude, with six dapple liberty horses, went through novel scenic routines. The clowns again were on the track with more walkarounds and stops.

No. 5—The Adele Nelson troupe of acrobats and the Koban troupe of Japanese marvels were exceptional acrobats and made a big hit with the audience.

No. 6—A wonderful group of six tigers, worked by Franz Woska, performed faster than any other group ever seen by the reviewer. The outstanding feature was one of the tigers jumping through a very small hoop held in Woska's hand over his head.

No. 7—Two groups of large elephants, three in each of rings 1 and 3, were under the direction of Frances Widener and Statia Carrey. No elephants have ever been seen to work faster or have more "mounts". The girls added plenty of pep with their dancing among the large animals.

No. 8—Steve Batty with his famous group of six fighting lions brought many gasps from the audience.

No. 9—Clever single elephant and two pony acts, worked by Babe Pope and Statia Carrey in the end rings, were accompanied by clowns on the track and in front of the center ring. Following this number there was an announcement of the concert and ticket salesmen started through the seats.

No. 10—A bareback act made up principally of the Guices, called the Spanish Ballerinos, with one of the numbers introducing comedy from the seats, occupied the center ring. The act was beautifully costumed in Spanish attire and Spanish dancing was performed by several members of the group. In the end ring Vladimir Schroude and Carl Wolfe presented novel groups of hurdling dogs.

No. 11—Pete Mardo's clowns held forth around the track, while the great Jap Sakato presented a thrilling 100 foot slide from the very top of the tent.

No. 12—Vladimir Schroude and Carl Wolfe had a horse and two German

The CANVAS-COVERED CLASSIC

SPARKS CIRCUS



AN ARMY OF ACCOMPLISHED ARENIC ARTISTS | COMPREHENSIVE MENAGERIE OF PERFECT ZOOLOGICAL SPECIMENS

2 HERDS OF PERFORMING ELEPHANTS

HUNDREDS OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HORSES EVER EXHIBITED!

TWO COMPLETE PERFORMANCES DAILY AT 2 AND 8 P.M. DOORS OPEN ONE HOUR EARLIER FOR RECEPTION OF PUBLIC IN MENAGERIE DEPARTMENT

GRAND FREE STREET PARADE AT 10:30 A.M. RAIN OR SHINE

PRICES CHILDREN UNDER 12 30c

Adults 75c, Including War Tax

Seats on Sale Circus Day at Corner Drug Store — Same Price As At Show Grounds

GREEN BAY

Circus Lot Opposite Paper Novelty Co.

THU. AUG. 23

The first Butler drawn newspaper ads were used by Sparks in 1923. This one was used in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Circus World Museum collection.

shepherd dogs, the first act of its kind to be presented in America, in each of the end rings.

No. 13—Nadia Miller did a very fast and clever tight wire act, none better to be seen anywhere. She held the atten-

tion of the audience every moment.

No. 14—Bessie Harvey with her pigeons, and wonderful voice, made a very favorable impression on the audience.

No. 15—Master horse trainer, Prof. Kloske, brought out his group of sixteen perfectly matched horses. These were thoroughbred "Rotation" liberty horses, with expensive trappings. The horses gave a truly wonderful exhibition of drills and formations, finishing with the entire sixteen doing a hind leg stand. This was undoubtedly the outstanding feature of the entire performance, and received rounds of applause. At that time there was no better liberty horse act on any show in America, and Sparks had a real winner in this.

No. 16—In the two end rings, Pete Mardo and his trio, and the Nelson trio, worked very fast acrobatic acts with plenty of comedy.

No. 17—The Flying Walters presented their long time Sparks favorite aerial bar act headed by Walter Guice.

No. 18—Again the clowns appeared in the big walkaround number.

No. 19—Nine of Sparks' dancing equines appeared, ridden by Florence Harris, Myrtle Mayo, Frances Widener, Lucille Aumann, Dorothy Batty, Minnie Rooney, Gertrude West, Vladimir Schroude and Equestrian Director Mayo, astride a beautiful cream-colored horse. This number had long been a highly thought of feature with the Sparks Circus.

No. 20—In the three rings there were a melange of animal acts—Vladimir Schroude, with llamas and ponies; Capt. Tiebor's talking sea lions; and Tom Burn's Bibb County pigs.

No. 21—Over ring 1 Kula York had a very pretty iron jaw number, while Babe Pope did a similar act over ring 3. At the same time there were four girls performing on swinging ladders over the track—Minnie Rooney, Gertrude West, Eva Miller and Gwen Carsy.

No. 22—The show concluded with an English fox hunt featuring Florence Harris in a great broad jump on the celebrated horse, King George, and Clyde Widener and Jim Carrey doing high jumps. Other riders were Weaver Gray, Tom Aumann, Statia Carrey, Lucille Aumann, Dorothy Batty, Hazel Bailey and Karl Mosher, ten horses being used in this number.

With the fox hunt the show concluded, taking just under two hours, much as in the preceding year. It is interesting to note that this show which could be classed only in the small medium size, had at least 50 horses being used in the performance.

Clown alley had a number of names that were later to become well known—headed by Pete Mardo and Paul Wentzell and supported by Harry Mick, an old Sparks' clown, Minert DeOrlo, Robert Nelson, Theo Nelson,



The number two side show on the Sparks Circus was the WONDERLAND snake pit show. This show was used during the 1920s by Sparks. Woodcock collection.

Stanley White and five others. This clown contingent of twelve was Sparks' largest to date.

The show was again enhanced by the fine music of Jack Phillips and his band, it now having 26 pieces, including J.M. Del Vecho on the air calliope—Sparks' largest band to date, a really big band and comparable to the biggest shows on the road at that time.

The concert, or after show, was again composed of a wild west and athletic show, featuring Weaver Gray, principal cowboy, and Tommy Mullin, middleweight boxer, holder of the English Lonsdale Belt for both boxing and wrestling. He would take on any of the local boys who were willing to risk it on the chance of winning \$10.

Out on the midway there was the side show managed by George Connors, with two men in the ticket boxes and E.L. Doty on the front door taking tickets. William DeBarrie was the inside lecturer and also did magic. Charles Holloway was the leader of the band and minstrels. The other acts were trained cockatoos and a Punch and Judy show, both done by Mrs. DeBarrie; a midget, the first freak of oddity that Sparks had ever had in his side show; a levitation act and snake handling, both by Helga Miller; a novelty act by Joe DeBarrie; and sword walking by Annie Levine. This added up to nine numbers, a fair show for the now 25¢ admission. Across the midway Charles Katz, again, had a pit show with one ticket box outside and two attractions inside—a large baboon and Kruno from the Everglades of Florida, probably a Seminole Indian with an alligator or two. This show was perhaps a bit larger, or at least more pretentious, than the 1923 edition. The performance was heavily weighted to animal acts, much after the fashion of the Al G. Barnes Circus: It was a somewhat different format for

Sparks, compared to former years, with only a scattering of acrobatic numbers, but it was apparently well received wherever it went, adding to its good reputation.

The management, advance and supervisory staffs, were virtually unchanged from 1923. Jake Posey, after taking over in mid-1923, in charge of the draft horses, was back, with Jim McKew, assisting. A new comer was Carl Strumm, who had charge of the sixteen liberty horse act. The rest of the ring stock continued to be watched over by Harry Phillips.

After the Thursday opening in Macon, the show moved to Atlanta for a two day stand, Friday and Saturday, April 4 and 5. Atlanta was followed by a long Sunday run to Gastonia, N.C., and then the show moved quickly into Virginia. Starting on April 14 they

Walter Guice and his wife, Flora Bedini, as shown in the backyard of the Sparks show in 1924. Woodcock collection.



The Toronto, Ontario, baseball team trained in Macon, Ga., using the Central City Park, sharing it with the Sparks show. The Toronto team is shown in 1923 with Sparks' elephants. Eddie Jackson photo.

began two plus weeks of moving in, out and around West Virginia, Ohio and Maryland before getting into Pennsylvania and Ohio firmly. At Morgantown, April 28, they had a heavy rain that delayed but did not force cancellation of the parade. Because of the rain the lot was in such poor condition it was necessary to cancel the evening show. However, all tickets for the evening show were honored the next day at Fairmount for anyone who wanted to, or could, travel the 18 miles or so to get there. Then at Fairmount more trouble arose. A landslide in the valley delayed the circus train and they were five hours late arriving there, reaching Fairmount at 10:10 a.m. It was necessary to cancel the parade. The afternoon show did not start until 4:00 and was over in a slightly cut version at 5:45. The concert was omitted. The evening show started on time to a capacity and appreciative audience.

The following week at Akron, May 5, they played to exceptional business with Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus due in only three days later. Both shows used the lot at Beaver and Exchange Streets. The Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey show was to be in Akron about seven weeks later, on June 25. In only one other town on the route would they cross swords with the Ringling-Barnum show, and that was in the twin cities of Bethlehem-Allentown, Pa., where Sparks was to play Bethlehem May 15, with the Big One due in at Allentown two weeks later on May 28.

On May 16, at Plainfield, N.J., despite threatening weather, the afternoon was packed. The next day at Stapleton, on Staten Island, they had capacity business at both shows. From there they moved out onto Long Island for a week of dates. While in this New York City area they were visited by many



Pete Mardo appeared with the Sparks Circus during the middle 1920's. Mardo photographed many of the circuses with which he traveled. Pfening collection.

from the "sho biz" world, all of whom were most complimentary.

After Long Island the show spent two and a half weeks moving up through New England, arriving in Maine at Sanford, on June 11. Here, in Maine, they spent two weeks to wonderful business before crossing the border at Calais into Canada. The good business in Maine came in spite of unseasonably cold weather.

The first date, in what was to be a two month stay in Canada, was at St. Johns, N.B., Monday, June 30. It was about this time that Sparks Circus was getting reams of publicity—all free. Earl Chapin May, a prolific writer of that period, had visited the show earlier and had written a number of articles about it. In the May 3 *Colliers* he said, "If You Can't Be For It Don't Be With It", and in the June issue of the *American Magazine*, "Pete Mardo, Clown Who Has Made Twenty Million

People Laugh", and in the current issue of *McClures*, "Bringing The Circus To Market", an article about the advance work and winterquarters preparation. This publicity, of course, was invaluable as an aid to the show, both in Canada and the United States.

After the St. Johns date they played in Moncton and then spent the next ten dates in Nova Scotia. They spent July 4 at Sidney, where the celebration consisted of the usual big spread in the cookhouse — Chow-chow; olives, pickles; fresh boiled Northumberland Strait salmon; roast turkey with fresh oyster dressing, giblet gravy and cranberry sauce; fresh sweet peas; boiled new potatoes; Kraft cheese and crackers; vanilla ice cream and jelly roll; coffee, milk and lemonade. How a show with its temporary and limited facilities and lack of preparation time could produce such a meal has always been a puzzle.

At Bridgewater, July 8, as the first wagon pulled onto the lot, a large moose stepped out of the adjoining woods. It surveyed the scene briefly, but did not like what it saw, and returned to the safety of the woods. During the early tour of Canada several ads appeared in the *Billboard* wanting help. They were looking for acrobats that could do comedy, wild west people, colored performers and musicians for the side show, and an experienced trombonist. And then, only two weeks later, they needed two trombonists, "must be union" and able to join at once. They were also looking for a lady prima donna, a lady to ride menage and able to sing and a novelty act for the side show. These ads made it look as though there were some big holes in the performance and possibly the side show. Tom Burns had developed a new act, an all white collie dog act, which helped fill the voids.

As the first month of the Canadian tour ended, the *Billboard* had a long

The Dolphin tableau wagon arrived from Moeller for the 1923 season. It is pictured here in a 1923 parade. Pfening collection.



Roland Butler designed this herald for the 1923 season. It was used for a number of later years. Pfening collection.

article on how successful the visit to Canada had been. Except for some shortage of help, no problems had arisen. However, in St. Catharines on August 6, there was a windstorm that snapped a quarter pole in the big top, while the elephant act was on. But no one was hurt and the elephants remained calm. At the same time all the stakes on one side of the menagerie top were pulled, causing the first blow-down of the season.

In St. Thomas, August 8, the lot was only a block from where Barnum's Jumbo had been killed by a train about 40 years before. In the week before returning to the States another large



"help wanted" ad appeared in the *Billboard* asking for a "two frog" contortion act, lady menage riders, wild west people (who it seems were always in short supply), a man to train dogs and monkeys, colored performers and musicians for the side show (another regular shortage) and a good novelty act for the side show. This was the longest list of "wants" for the season.

The first stand back in the States, after 5,290 miles in Canada, was September 1 in Defiance, Ohio, and the show was again reviewed two days later on the 3rd, at Middletown. Contrary to indications from the various ads in the *Billboard*, there were not many changes in the big show and it still had 22 displays. Bessie Harris and her doves, Adele Nelson and her troupe of acrobats and horse trainer Vladimir Schroude were gone. The two six horse liberty horse numbers had been eliminated, but the big 16 horse act trained by Ernest Kloske was still in. Added were the two Boston Brothers, acrobats, who featured a hand to hand catch over seven men; Bonita Boston, lady juggler; Prince Sakato, a perch act in which he teamed with Yamada, a boy who also walked upstairs on his head; and the Totsu brothers, also in a perch act. And while not new on the show, Lucille Aumann had replaced Bessie Harris in the vocal number with the trained doves. The show now had a little more emphasis on acrobatics than it did when it had opened in Macon. However, one loss that was not made up was in clown alley, now down from twelve to seven.

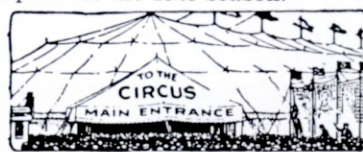
By September 10, Sparks' Circus was into North Carolina, and starting its usual long southern Fall tour. And immediately they ran into opposition from one of the big shows, Sells-Floto Circus. The billing war became so bad that both shows went into court and in a very unusual action, each obtained a restraining order against the other against covering others advertising. The next two months were spent in covering pretty thoroughly both large and small towns in the Carolinas, Alabama and Georgia, with the latter state seeing the show in thirty towns, with a number of them being under the

The air calliope, with an eight pony hitch, is ready for a 1924 parade of the Sparks show. The Dolphin is at the right. Both wagons came from Moeller Bros. Woodcock collection.

auspices of the Elks. Rumors persisted that the show would be further enlarged in 1925, this time to thirty cars, but was denied by Mr. Sparks.

Then on November 12 it entered Florida at Quincy for fifteen dates, including two days in Miami, where they broke all attendance records for the season, playing to five capacity houses on Monday and Tuesday. A second show could also have been given on Tuesday, but the show people were too tired. The Fire Chief closed the ticket wagon twenty minutes before show time because of the crowds in the tents. The jumps of the fox hunting number at the end of the show had to be omitted because of the people using the track for seats. At St. Petersburg 17, and Tampa, 18, they followed Sells-Floto by two weeks. Although Sells-Floto Circus had been playing all around Florida for about a week early in November, these were the only two stands where they crossed paths.

Finally the highly successful season came to an end on December 1, at Savannah. After traveling 16,795 miles the show again returned to Macon, Georgia, its winterquarters. There about 360 people were paid off, while 50 were to remain in Macon to help prepare for the 1925 season.



SPARKS CIRCUS ROUTE 1924

April

3, Macon, Ga.; 4, Atlanta; 5, Atlanta; S; 7, Gastonia, N.C.; 8, Salisbury; 9, Danville, Va.; 10, Lynchburg; 11, Roanoke; 12, Pulaski; S; 14, Bluefield, W. Va.; 15, Williamson; 16, Ironton, Ohio; 17, Portsmouth; 18, Huntington, W. Va.; 19, Loga; S; 21, Beckley; 22, Charleston; 23, Gassoway; 24, Elkins; 25, Cumberland, Md.; 26, Uniontown, Pa.; S; 28, Morgantown, W. Va.; 29, Clarksburg; 30, Fairmount.

May

1, Connellsville, Pa.; 2, Vandergrift; 3, Indiana; S; 5,

Akron, Ohio; 6, Warren; 7, Butler, Pa.; 8, Kittanning; 9, New Kensington; 10, Charleroi; S; 12, Mt. Carmel; 13, Shamokin; 14, Mahony City; 15, Bethlehem; 16, Plainfield, N.J.; 17, Stapleton, N.Y.; S; 19, Queens; 20, Bayside; 21, Hempstead; 22, Glen Cove; 23, Patchogue; 24, Rockville Center; S; 26, Poughkeepsie; 27, Danbury, Conn.; 28, Meriden; 29, Manchester; 30, Torrington; 31, Holyoke, Mass.

June

S; 2, Woonsocket, R.I.; 3, Newport; 4, Fall River, Mass.; 5, New Bedford; 6, Taunton; 7, Waltham; S; 9, Manchester, N.H.; 10, Laconia; 11, Sanford, Me.; 12, Biddeford; 13, Bath; 14, Rockland; S; 16, Lewiston; 17, Rumford; 18, Madison; 19, Dover-Foxcroft; 20, Houlton; 21, Vanburen; S; 23, Caribou; 24, Millinocket; 25, Bangor; 26, Ellsworth; 27, Eastport; 28, Calais; S; 30, St. Johns, N.B.

July

1, Moncton; 2, New Glasgow, N.S.; 3, Pt. Hawkesbury; 4, Sydney; 5, North Sydney; S; 7, Halifax; 8, Bridgewater; 9, Yarmouth; 10, Digby; 11, Kentville; 12, Truro; S; 14, Charlottetown, P.E.I.; 15, Summerside; 16, Amherst; 17, New Castle, N.B.; 18, Fredericton; 19, Woodstock; S; 21, Sherbrooke, Que.; 22, Thetford Mines; 23, Quebec; 24, Quebec; 25, Shawinigan Falls; 26, Three Rivers; S; 28, Ottawa, Ont.; 29, Cornwall; 30, Brockville; 31, Kingston.

August

1, Belleville; 2, Oshawa; S; 4, Toronto; 5, Toronto; 6, St. Catharines; 7, Hamilton; 8, St. Thomas; 9, Woodstock; S; 11, Owen Sound; 12, Stratford; 13, Guelph; 14, Peterboro; 15, Smith's Falls; 16, Pembroke; S; 18, Timmons; 19, North Cobalt; 20, North Bay; 21, Sudbury; 22, Carillia; 23, Midland; S; 25, Kitchener; 26, Brentford; 27, London; 28, Sarnia; 29, Chatham; 30, Windsor; S.

September

1, Defiance, Ohio; 2, Sidney; 3, Middletown; 4, Georgetown, Ky.; 5, Danville; 6, Somerset; S; 8, Knoxville, Tenn.; 9, Morristown; 10, Asheville, N.C.; 11, Hickory; 12, Statesville; 13, Concord; S; 15, Winston-Salem; 16, High Point; 17, Burlington; 18, Durham; 19, Raleigh; 20, Greenville; S; 22, Rocky Mount; 23, Wilson; 24, Goldsboro; 25, Wilmington; 26, Lumberton; 27, Rockingham; S; 29, Shelby; 30, Gaffney, S.C.

October

1, Greenville; S; 2, Seneca; 3, Toccoa, Ga.; 4, Gainesville, Ga.; 6, Gadsden, Ala.; 7, Talladega; 8, LaGrange, Ga.; 9, Cordele; 10, Douglas; 11, Tifton; S; 13, Jacksonville, Fla.; 14, Waycross, Ga.; 15, Thomasville; 16, Dothan, Ala.; 17, Bainbridge, Ga.; 18, Cutbert; S; 20, Americus; 21, Fitzgerald; 22, Vidalia; 23, Dublin; 24, Statesboro; 25, Waynesboro; S; 27, Augusta; 28, Washington; 29, Athens; 30, Madison; 31, Eatonton.

November

1, Covington; S; 3, Marietta; 4, Cartersville; 5, Cedar-town; 6, Newman; 7, Griffin; 8, Fort Valley; S; 10, Dawson; 11, Arlington; 12, Quincy, Fla.; 13, Tallahassee; 14, Live Oak; 15, Leesburg; S; 17, St. Petersburg; 18, Tampa; 19, Bradenton; 20, Bartow; 21, Arcadia; 22, Kissimmee; S; 24, Miami; 25, Miami; 26, West Palm Beach; 27, Fort Pierce; 28, Daytona; 29, St. Augustine; S.

December

1, Savannah, Ga.

Season Ends. Total mileage: 16,795.



SINGING WHEELS AND CIRCUS WAGONS
 Gene Plowden
 Caxton Printers, Ltd., 144 pp., \$4.95
 (paperback)

THE GREAT CIRCUS STREET PARADE IN PICTURES
 Charles Philip Fox and F. Beverly Kelley
 Dover Publications, Inc., 127 pp., \$5.00
 (paperback)

A bonanza has just been declared for persons interested in photographs of circus parade wagons. These two volumes, published within days of each other, are filled with pictures of parades dating from pre-photography times to the recent series of Fourth-of-July parades in Milwaukee. The Plowden book has more narrative than the other, as befits the work of a former newspaperman, while the Fox-Kelley volume has more pictures. The last is reminiscent of Fox' 1953 volume, *Circus Parades*, and sixteen plates from that effort appear in this one. However, the quality of reproduction in this Fox-Kelley book are far superior to those of 1953 and, in fact, are the best reproductions possible; it would be difficult to improve upon them. When one realizes that some of these photographs are from the 1870's, the excellence is even more marked.

Both volumes offer a history of circus parades, Plowden by narrative and Fox-Kelley by separating the parts of parades (i.e., bandwagons, musical units, cages, etc.). The illustrations in each are in more-or-less chronological order. The Plowden book contains no surprises for the historian, all the pictures are known, though most have not been published enough to make them repetitious. It is probably a benefit to have them collected in this form. The Fox-Kelley work, on the other hand, has several lithographs and photos that we have been looking forward to seeing printed and their appearance has certainly been worth the wait. Fine examples of the early photographer's art appear in the prints of the "Five Graces," "Chariot of India" and the Globe tableau. There are

also four colored lithographs and four in black-and-white that, alone, would recommend the volume.

The Fox-Kelley book has informative captions, for the most part, whereas the Plowden effort is rather weak in that regard, a decided disadvantage. It appears almost as if someone at the publishing house had written them, they so lack substance. And, there is a strange group of photos unrelated to parades included, the message of which eludes us.

Both volumes are offered as history, C.P. Fox being well-known for his interest in the field, and Plowden having done, to quote him, "a tremendous amount of research." Yet errors abound in each work, to their obvious devaluation in the eyes of those interested in circus history. In Plowden's case, the reason is obvious. He lists in his preface the persons who assisted him and there isn't a wagon historian among them. Had he consulted the likes of Fred Dahlinger, Fred Pfening, III, or Joseph Bradbury he could easily avoided his mistakes.



The oft-published series of photos taken at St. Patrick's Cemetery in Lynn, Massachusetts (pages 28, 29, 31 and 57) are here labelled Barnum & Bailey "about 1912," when it has long since been established that they are of Forepaugh-Sells' in the years 1902-1907. Plowden lists Richard Conover's *Fielding Bandchariots* as one of his sources, yet it is in that book that the information was published.

He does the same thing textually in his discussion of early tenting (page 27) and the "Appollicon" (page 30), both of which can be verified in 1976 issues of *Bandwagon*, a source the

author says he used, but obviously not to its potential.

Other examples are the caption, on page 26, of a photograph of the Barnum & Bailey parade of 1909 as being 1883-85 and, on page 17, a well-known photo of the Forepaugh-Sells parade of circa 1895 being captioned Gollmar Brothers, 1893. A 1935 Bailey Bros. Circus wagon is listed as 1905, perhaps a typographical error.

In Fox' case there is less understanding of the reason for basic errors, one can only guess that they are the result of carelessness, for surely the material did not strain the resources. Oddly, they all occur on twentieth-century pictures. The photograph on page 60 is not 1912, but 1914 or later; the one on page 64 is 1909, not "around 1915"; the one at the top of page 76 has long known to have been taken in 1905 (it was also mis-dated in the 1953 book). The pictures at the top of page 37 and on page 38 are identified as Ringling Brothers 1911 and 1910, respectively, when it is common knowledge that the wagons were built for the Forepaugh-Sells Show of 1910 and 1911 and weren't transferred to Ringling Brothers until 1912 (one of them even has Heck's date—1916—clearly written on its face). Perhaps the most serious mis-identification, because it is not a matter of dating, is in captioning the photograph at the bottom of page 89 as Ringling Brothers, when it is clearly a Barnum & Bailey cage, one of those transferred from Forepaugh-Sells.

These corrections are not petty, the books are either serious attempts at history, or they are not, and one certainly cannot doubt the good intentions of the authors. The errors, be they of ignorance or carelessness, detract not one bit from the value of the reproductions and we urge anyone interested in the subject to purchase both of these volumes. They are reasonably priced and their contents cannot be obtained as inexpensively any other way. As the Ringling Brothers once said of their giraffe, "Human eyes will never see another," at least not for some time.

Stuart Thayer

